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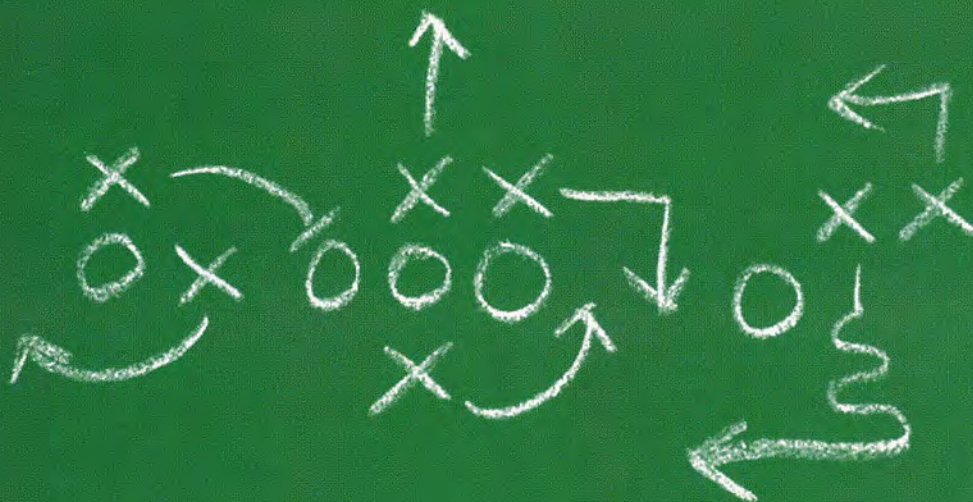
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By Mike Babcock

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If the Colorado game was any indication, the emotional death of the Husker football team has been greatly exaggerated.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Destroy A&M

Something has to be done about Texas A&M. I mean, who do they think they are? First, their football team steals a win from us, which is a big part of the reason why I will tune in to the Sugar Bowl game to watch the Aggies get pummeled. Nebraska should be the team playing in a BCS bowl. That loss also ruined our chance to defend our national title. Now the Aggies have put a blemish on our volleyball team, which is also going for a national championship. We know that they are inferior to us. Unfortunately, they don't seem to understand this basic fact of life. They need to be taught a severe lesson. I propose that we sell the entire state back to Mexico. If that doesn't work and we really need to punish them, then we can always sell them to the French.

Tom Hawthorne
Lincoln, Neb.

Patient With Solich

In spite of what a lot of the critics are saying, I think Frank Solich is doing a fine job in his first year as head coach. His team struggled with injuries all year long. How many teams would go 9-3 if they had to play that much with second- and third-string quarterbacks and running backs? Most teams would love to be 9-3 under any circumstances. Those teams would also like the revenue that comes with a bowl appearance. Everybody was disappointed to see some long winning streaks end, but all the teams that beat us are excellent teams. If we lost to Iowa State, we would have cause for concern. Solich will get better as a coach, and his teams will get better with him. I'm sure that everyone who is upset with the job Solich has done will be cheering for him when he leads the Huskers to another national title in the coming years.

Brian Greensfeld
Kansas City, Mo.

Positive Spin

We have known for a while that we would not be returning to Tempe for the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl this year. It's time to look at the bright side. Regardless of the fact that the Huskers have found themselves in the Holiday Bowl, a lot of loyal

fans will get to travel to San Diego, and the team will get an opportunity to finish on a positive note with a win against Arizona.

Zack Morris
Omaha, Neb.



New BCS Flaw

I keep hearing people talk about the flaws in the new Bowl Championship Series ranking system. They talk about problems with schedule strength and margin of victory, but I think there is another flaw that they have overlooked. They don't give any consideration to the defending champion. In a championship boxing match, for example, the champion is always considered the

favorite, and the challenger is the underdog. Even if the Huskers had finished the season undefeated, the predetermined ranking system could have prevented them from playing for the championship. With Tennessee and UCLA starting out ahead of Nebraska in the rankings, the Huskers could only have gone so far up the rankings. Add this to long list of reasons why the BCS is a failure and needs to be reworked or scrapped completely.

Robert Dawson
Denver, Colo.

Women's Soccer

The Nebraska women's soccer team had a great season and should be congratulated. They don't get as much attention as the football team, of course, or even as much as the volleyball team, but these women have just finished up a fantastic season. For those who may not have noticed, they advanced to the third round of the NCAA Tournament before losing to Notre Dame. This is an outstanding accomplishment, especially considering how far women's soccer has advanced in the last few years. I wish the team all the best and look forward to watching them advance even farther next season.

Becky Ramirez
Lincoln, Neb.

Got Something To Say?

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VOLUME 19, NUMBER 1

Huskers Illustrated

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(402) 423-3405

Huskers Illustrated (ISSN 0279-3474) is published monthly January through May and December, bi-monthly Jun/Jul.; weekly September through November except open dates. Single issue cost \$2.95; subscription rate for one year (17 issues) is \$49.90. First Class postage is available for an additional charge of \$16.00 per year. Foreign postage \$34.00.

Huskers Illustrated is published by Landmark Publications, Inc., 601 Taylorsville Road, Shelbyville, Ky., 40065, (502) 633-4334. Periodicals postage paid at Dallas, Texas.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Huskers Illustrated, P.O. Box 83222, Lincoln, Neb. 68501.

Address all editorial related correspondence to **Huskers Illustrated**, P.O. Box 83222, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501.

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For Subscription Inquiries mail to P.O. Box 83222, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501-3222. Allow six to eight weeks for response. Give old and new addresses and enclose latest mailing address label when writing about your subscription.

HI ONLINE

(www.sportscom.com/huskers)

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Monday - Friday: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
(Central Time)

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Publisher: huskerspab@sportscom.com
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Circulation: huskercirc@sportscom.com



Parting Shots

For 21 seniors, it wasn't a storybook ending to an otherwise incredible reign, but there will be plenty of great memories to reflect on



Bill Lafleur (top) laughs at the recollection. He was reading a capsule about himself in a prep football magazine during his senior year at Norfolk (Catholic) High School.

The magazine had chosen him as the offensive player of the year in his school's classification. He was a first-team all-state quarterback and punter, in addition to playing safety on defense.

After finishing the capsule, Lafleur turned the page and read a capsule on East Butler High School's **Joel Makovicka** (bottom), the magazine's choice as eight-man offensive player of the year.

"I looked at him and thought: 'This kid's nothing. He's not so big.' He was listed at 190 (pounds)," said Lafleur, who also weighed about 190. "Two years later, Joel's 230 and I'm still 190."

Two years later, Lafleur and Makovicka were teammates and roommates at Nebraska. They had both walked on, with goals of earning scholarships and playing for the Cornhuskers.

Makovicka achieved those goals sooner than Lafleur. But they've both been successful and will leave Nebraska with three national championship rings and the satisfaction of realizing a dream.

1998 Senior Class

Kris Brown, PK
Lance Brown, WB
Kenny Cheatham, SE
Monte Christo, QB
Jay Foreman, MLB
Russell Froehlich, SLB
Ben Gessford, OG/OT
Billy Haafke, SE
Josh Heskew, C
Quint Hogrefe, SLB
Sheldon Jackson, TE
Chad Kelsay, RE
Bill Lafleur, P
Billy Legate, FB
Joel Makovicka, FB
Brian Morro, P
Mike Rucker, RE
Travis Toline, RE
Brandt Wade, OG
Shevin Wiggins, WB
Jason Wiltz, DT

"I'm happy with the way everything has been," said Lafleur, the Cornhuskers' punter this season and one of 21 seniors who suited up for the final time at Memorial Stadium against Colorado. "But if I could be a freshman again, I would do it. It's been great, everything I thought it would be."

Lafleur is among 18 fifth-year seniors who are finishing their careers.

Rush end **Chad Kelsay**, a co-captain, and place-kicker **Kris Brown**, Nebraska's career-scoring leader, are the only seniors who have played without redshirting. "It went by fast," Kelsay said.

During the four seasons

the seniors played, Nebraska had a combined 45-5 record with two national championships and two conference championships. They also saw the transition from **Tom Osborne** to **Frank Solich** as head coach — which is among Kelsay's fondest memories.

"Playing for Coach Osborne's last game, making sure he goes out a

winner, that was so important to everybody on the team last year," Kelsay said. "We had to send him out a winner."

"And it's been great playing in Coach Solich's first year, too. I don't think a lot of guys have the opportunity to play for two great coaches. So that's something I'll remember."

That his final collegiate season was also Solich's first as head coach has made it extra special, according to senior rush end **Mike Rucker**.

"This is one year he's going to remember, probably his first and maybe one in the middle, a big game or something, and his last," Rucker said of Solich.

Not surprisingly, one of Rucker's fondest memories of his Cornhusker career occurred during the 49-25 victory against Kansas State in 1995, when he was a red-shirt freshman.

"I was on special teams, and I knocked **Joe Gordon**'s helmet off," he said. "That was my first (time) being on the scene."

Rucker, Kelsay, tackle **Jason Wiltz** and middle linebacker **Jay Foreman** were the only senior defensive starters for the Colorado game, with rush end **Travis Toline** and strongside linebacker **Quint**

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

REYNOLDS, FINISTER QUIT TEAM

Jeff Hemje, a redshirt freshman from Grand Island, Neb., was listed on the pre-Colorado depth chart as the No. 2 right cornerback following the departure of sophomore **Khari Reynolds**, who had been junior **Ralph Brown**'s backup. Reynolds, a scholarship recruit from Mays Landing, N.J., apparently was unhappy with his playing time — he started one game at nickel back — and quit the team.

Reynolds planned to transfer to a smaller school closer to home, according to coach **Frank Solich**.

Sophomore **Demond Finister**, a walk-on defensive back from Boys Town, Neb., also quit the team.

BRAINS AND BRAWN

The Nebraska football team led the Big 12 in four-class (1988-91) graduation rate for the third consecutive year, according to statistics released by the conference in mid-November. The 66 percent graduation rate was the highest in school history, up from 63 percent a year ago.

The Nebraska football team also led the conference in graduation rate for African-Americans with a school-record 64 percent. The graduation rate for African-American football student-athletes nationally was 43 percent, and 56 percent for African-American students nationally overall.

The national graduation rate for football students overall was 52 percent.

Nebraska's 66 percent graduation rate ranked fifth nationally.

NO FRY IN SIGHT

Nebraska begins a home-and-home series with Iowa next season at Iowa City. But **Hayden Fry** won't be on sideline as the Hawkeyes' head coach. Fry announced his retirement after 20 seasons at Iowa.

"It was, I guess, not a complete surprise, at least to me, that he stepped down. The way he was wording things would maybe indicate that he was contemplating that possibility," Solich said.

"Hayden Fry's a great football coach. He ranks up there as one of the outstanding coaches in college football. Any time you're able to stay in place at a major college program like he has and get accomplished what he's gotten accomplished, it means you've done an outstanding job."

Fry's record at Iowa was 143-89-6 (.613) and 232-178-10 (.564) overall.

He was in his first season as the Hawkeyes' head coach when Nebraska and Iowa began a four-game series in 1979. The Cornhuskers won three of the four games, losing at Iowa City in 1981 (10-7). ■

Hogrefe the only other seniors among the 37 defensive players listed on the top three units.

"It's been a special group to me," said Solich. "I think the fact that they felt maybe as badly as anyone about not getting it all done, not winning them all. Certainly they took everything hard."

"And yet they continued to show great leadership. They continued to give a great effort."

"We did not have one senior who threw in the towel because of goals not being met. They came out and really demanded that this team move forward, so I've got a tremendous respect for this senior class, in not only what they've accomplished but also how they've gone about trying to accomplish things."

Maintaining focus wasn't easy, given the success in Osborne's final five seasons.

"When you're in this position of being involved with a football team that is following as many great football teams as this team has followed in the last four to five years, then without question, every game's a big one," said Solich. "I can truthfully say that really I've had no rival this year."

"All the games were big games this year. I was constantly reminded of that."

Seven offensive starters for the Colorado game were seniors, as well as both kickers.

Lafleur, who punted

only four times during his first three seasons at Nebraska, averaged that many punts per game this season. Because of the Cornhuskers' inexperience on offense, "I knew there was a possibility we'd be punting more than normal," he said. "That's good and bad."

"After five years, I'd like to play. But you want the team to do as well as possible."

Regardless of how often the opportunity presented itself, "to be able to punt for Nebraska is great," said Lafleur. "There's nothing like getting off a good punt and hearing the crowd cheer."

Or jeer. Lafleur remembers making his first road trip to Colorado in 1995. Walking in to Folsom Field with fans booing, "almost makes you happy, thinking they hate you that much," he said.

Such experiences created team unity and lasting friendships, according to Lafleur.

"My stay here has been great," he said. "I've played on some of the best teams Nebraska has ever had, with some of the best players Nebraska has ever had," including Makovicka.

"We get along pretty good," Lafleur said. "I like to give him a hard time."

"Joel knows, I think, if we had met in high school, he would have been in trouble." ■

Said Solich

On his first season:

"The season, as far as I'm concerned, has really gone by very, very quickly. It's been really a great group of players to work with. I think the coaching staff has enjoyed this football team very much in terms of their (the players') attitude, their response to things, their effort."

"Every week come Monday, they stepped on the football field ready to go back to work. Of course, some of those

Mondays they've come off a couple of losses where they've been tremendously disappointed."

On Nebraska's rivals: "I'll tell you, it appears to me that we've got a lot of rivals, and I mean that seriously because every time we step on the field against an opponent, this program has won so much, and within the last four or five years won more than anybody, that we get everybody's best shot."

"If everybody's not trying to build their program around beating you, they feel their program's there and they want to prove a point."

On the Cornhuskers' sometimes-

erratic offense this season:

"Overall, it's not been easy getting the ball in the end zone. We've had a couple of games where we got it done at a pretty high level. But we have not been as consistent as what (Nebraska) teams have been in the past."

On sophomore I-back DeAngelo Evans, who was hampered by injuries throughout the season:

"It's just kind of been one thing after another, and I think it's been really tough on him, as it would be with anybody who's gone through what he has gone through. He's doing the best he can to get himself back to where he can play football."

Huskers' Fans Should Feel For The Wildcats

The Big 12 should have stepped in and helped Kansas State from suffering the same fate that cost Nebraska an upper-echelon bowl in 1980



Mike BABCOCK

NEBRASKA FOOTBALL fans ought to sympathize with Kansas State's bowl-game predicament. They ought to. But most probably don't. It's human nature.

The night before the No. 14-ranked Cornhuskers play No. 5 Arizona in the Holiday Bowl, No. 4 Kansas State will play unranked Purdue in the Alamo Bowl.

The Wildcats ought to be playing Mississippi State in the Cotton Bowl on New Year's Day at the very least, and if the Bowl Championship Series were constituted properly, they would be playing Syracuse in the Orange Bowl game, in a rematch of last season's Fiesta Bowl game.

But the Orange Bowl didn't do the right thing. And neither did the Big 12 Conference.

Had Kansas State defeated Texas A&M in the Big 12 championship game, the Wildcats would be playing Tennessee in the Fiesta Bowl with a national title on the line. They lost in double overtime, however, and will be spending the holidays in San Antonio, Texas. There's nothing wrong with San Antonio, really, or the Alamo Bowl, for that matter. But the once-beaten Wildcats deserve better as the runner-up in the conference, as well as its highest-ranked team.

The Orange Bowl couldn't avoid taking Syracuse because of an agreement with the Big East. But it could have done the right thing and taken Kansas State instead of 9-2 Florida.

The decision was based solely on economic considerations. The Orange Bowl won't have to work at marketing its game. For obvious geographical reasons, Florida will take care of that on Jan. 2.

Certainly, the Orange Bowl should be able to act in its best interests, to a degree. But if it is to enjoy the prestige of being one of the four Bowl Championship Series games — the others are the Rose Bowl, the Sugar Bowl and the Fiesta Bowl — then it should be required to make some concessions.

OK, so the Orange Bowl didn't do the right thing and invite Kansas State as one of two at-large teams in the Bowl Championship Series games. Why didn't the Cotton Bowl invite the Wildcats? And if the Cotton Bowl didn't want to do the right thing by inviting them, why didn't the Big 12 intervene?

The Cotton Bowl has first pick of Big 12 teams that don't

get in Bowl Championship Series games. It is the most prestigious bowl game aligned with the conference, after the Fiesta Bowl, and as such, should have a responsibility to take the loser of the conference championship game.

Instead, the Cotton Bowl took Texas, which should come as no surprise given the fact that the interests of Texas and, to a lesser degree Texas A&M, have driven the Big 12 from its beginning. Once again, we have been reminded that the power in the conference resides in the South Division.

Nebraska also benefitted from the Big 12's laissez-faire attitude toward bowl games. If the matchups had been determined strictly on merit, Kansas State should have gone to the Cotton Bowl and Texas should have gone to the Holiday Bowl, based on the Longhorns' conference finish.

But Nebraska is an attractive bowl team because of its fan following — the Cornhuskers still might have been in the running for a berth in the Cotton Bowl had Texas not beaten Texas A&M. Nebraska also deserves consideration at bowl time because of the revenue it has shared with the conference in winning national championships in three of the last four seasons.

So the Holiday Bowl is an appropriate destination, despite three losses. Even so, Nebraska fans shouldn't take delight in Kansas State's plight.

The last time the Cornhuskers played in a minor bowl was in 1980, when they defeated Mississippi State, 31-17, in the Sun Bowl game, a situation similar to the one Kansas State is facing.

Nebraska went into its final regular-season game in 1980 — at Memorial Stadium — ranked No. 4 in the Associated Press

poll. The Cornhuskers' opponent, Oklahoma, was ranked No. 9. The Sooners made arrangements through the Big Eight Conference to go to the Sun Bowl in case they lost to Nebraska. They won, however, 21-17, and represented the conference in the Orange Bowl, defeating Florida State, 18-17, while Nebraska was forced to go to the Sun Bowl.

The Cornhuskers weren't particularly interested in going to the Sun Bowl and probably could have done better. But the conference made the commitment on OU's behalf.

In addition, the Big 12's determination to have a football playoff cost Nebraska an opportunity to play for the national championship in 1996. And it cost Kansas State that chance this season.

The difference is, the Cornhuskers still got to play in the Orange Bowl game in 1996, while Kansas State has been sent packing for San Antonio to play an 8-4 opponent. ■



The Big 12 has no control over the Orange Bowl, but it does in theory, over the Cotton Bowl, which opted for Ricky Williams and Texas over Kansas State.

Ten-Win Season Was Taste Huskers Were Looking For

At most schools, 9-3 is a sign of success, but at Nebraska, it is difficult for fans to digest



Johnny RODGERS

DID THE Nebraska Cornhuskers really end up 9-3? What manner of madness is this, and where is it going? Away, I hope.

There are lots of NCAA Division I-A schools that would love to have finished with a 9-3 season. Your Iowa States, Indianas, Wake Forests and SMUs would all die for that successful of a season. But at Nebraska, 9-3 is not digestible, and the fans do not want a steady diet of it.

We have been spoiled by success, which is not necessarily a bad thing. It tastes so good. "National Champions" has such a wonderful ring to it. "We're No. 1" is an exhilarating chant.

The view from the top is so much better. When you have won it all, the state gets to stick its collective chest out and strut about for the whole year, shouting, "We are the best."

National championship? We've been there, done that. And we love doing it over and over.

With slight tongue-in-cheek, let's critique the season.

Our offensive line was reported to be the biggest, the strongest and the fastest at dear old Nebraska U. But the question burns: Was it also the most intimidating? During some of this season's games, the line seemed to have been playing with a sense of fear. Tradition and talent have always been staples when speaking of Nebraska's offensive line. Needless to say, tradition is an awesome thing to live up to, and talent alone will not win games. You've got to have heart. Division I-A is full of unsuccessful teams loaded with talent. What separates the winners from the also-rans? Desire and motivation.

What if we had not sustained so many injuries at key positions, such as quarterback, I-back and wide receiver? Would the season have ended differently? Good question. I don't know. But I do know that you can't get "what if" to suit up and get in the game.

The best team on paper is loaded with prime-time players named "What If," "Maybe," "Perhaps," "Could Have, Should Have, Would Have" and "Hope To." But I have never seen any of these guys sack a quarterback, go deep down the sideline, bust one up the middle for six, kick a game-winning field goal or chug-a-lug a cup of Gatorade. You have to play with the hand you are dealt, and you have to play smart and hard for four quarters each week.

We played super and lost. We played awful and won. Against Kansas State, we performed great, but the Wildcats were one player — quarterback Michael Bishop — better.

We were thoroughly outplayed by Oklahoma State and ended up on top. In my estimation, this was the only game in which Nebraska was soundly beaten but managed to prevail. Luck was definitely clad in scarlet and cream that night. Go Big Luck. Last season, the fortune gods smiled on us during the Missouri game, and it seemed to have fortified the team and propelled the Cornhuskers to the coaches' national championship. But luck is fickle, and a traitor, who

owes no allegiance to any team. Today he may wear red, tomorrow maize and blue or black and gold. Who knows? The point is, you can't count on luck to show up when you need it most.

Our offensive coordination and play-calling could stand to be more creative. When every nostril in the stadium can smell a fullback blast coming, send in another play. Please. On third-and-5, with the defense stacked 11 men on the line of scrimmage, I think the defense might feel a running play is coming.

We don't always have to run the option. This is not soccer, where you have to advance the ball with your feet. We could have thrown the ball to Kenny Cheatham, Shevin Wiggins or Sheldon Jackson. I don't believe that there is a linebacker or defensive back in the Big 12 who could handle Jackson. What we lacked more than anything else this season was speed, and the guys who have a little haven't had

the ball enough. You always have to have a big play in a big game that goes your way.

I'm not a coach, but many do agree that our "bend, don't break" defense is broken. The first game of the season, our secondary was scorched for over 400 pass receiving yards by one player — Louisiana Tech's Troy Edwards — for an NCAA record, which set the tone for the entire season.

As a fan and former player, I know we will do much better next season. Faith tells me that Big Red will be back on top. Looking to the future, the sophomores we have returning, although battered and demoralized, will play for the national championship before they graduate. But the coaching staff will have to continue to grow with the players.

We will be all right and will hold the crystal football high again and bring that trophy back to Lincoln where it belongs, and where the fans expect it to be. It's just a matter of time. ■



Opening the offense and utilizing the speed of Shevin Wiggins may have given the Huskers an edge against run-stopping defenses.

Lights, Tunnel Walks, And Action

Who needs television when there's plenty of drama on the football field?



Bill DOLEMAN

WITH FOOTBALL season nearing its end and the holiday season heating up, so to speak, it's time to clean off the set a little bit and look ahead to next year.

First down. It's my objectively biased opinion that Husker fans have good reason to look forward to the 1999 campaign, if for no other reason than it's hard to believe the injuries and inexperience problems that plagued the Big Red could be any worse than they've been in the past five months.

Because of all of the bumps and bruises that Frank Solich and company had to endure, a number of younger players saw an incredible amount of playing time that should put the Big Red ahead come spring and fall.

Second down. To say this has been an interesting year for the Nebraska football team and fans would be as big of an understatement as saying Tom Osborne was a pretty good coach.

Even though ticket prices have had to increase in recent years, it would be fair to say those lucky enough in life or lottery to hold them got their money's worth in 1998.

Every game had a unique twist to it: The Louisiana Tech air show starring Tim Rattay and Troy Edwards ushered in the Solich era; Ala.-Birmingham brought in the Wishbone; 40,000-plus Big Red fans who traveled to the San Francisco Bay area for the California game; Nebraska's near-perfect performance against then No.8-ranked Washington; the Oklahoma State game, played in Kansas City; a shutout against Kansas under the lights at Memorial Stadium; another memorable matchup against Missouri; a win in the snow at Iowa State; and a feel-good win over Colorado in the regular-season finale.

OK. OK. There were those three losses to Texas A&M, Texas and Kansas State, but all three went down to the wire and without question could have gone either way. In all, there were six — count 'em, six — games that went down to the final heart-pounding minutes, seconds and, in one case, the final play.

While some may prefer the easy afternoon blowouts (see 1995 Huskers), the sights and sounds of high drama in Memorial Stadium is one of college football's great experiences. Heck, the whole show is without peer. That "Tunnel Walk" is kind of fun to watch.

Third down. What's Solich like on the show? Easily the

most-asked question of the year. And the answer most often given is, "great."

Not that his performance on *The Frank Solich Show* is a high priority. After all, his job is to coach a football team. But Frank has been great to work for, and he's been a quick learner.

Prior to the first show we did in August, I sent over a rundown of what we had planned, and I included a television do-and-don't list straight out of Broadcasting 101. Things like lean forward, which camera to look at, how to analyze plays and above all else, smile.

He wanted to do well, and I think he has, especially after losses.

There is no easy way to do shows like that. He's been professional and personable in victory and defeat, on and off the set. I get the feeling after a much-needed and well-deserved vacation, he's looking forward to applying all he's learned in the past 12 months and applying it to his second season as the Huskers' head coach. Solich is a class act.

Touchdown. 'Tis the season for recruiting, and granted there aren't too many days outside of game days that are met with as much anticipation as "Who'd We Get Day," better known as national letter-of-intent signing day. But before folks get too excited about who might be coming, here's a final word about who's going.

One of my favorite days is senior day at Memorial Stadium. Call me a sentimentalist, but I get a lump in my throat when I see the members of the senior class run

one-by-one into the sea of red for their final appearance. This year's group of seniors was self-maligned from time to time and at times apologetic. They needn't have been. The fifth-year seniors were a part of three national championships. The rest won two. Together they won 57 games and left the Memorial Stadium turf on a high note with a win over Colorado. Sure, there were a couple of losses that will hurt for a while, but given all they had been through during a tumultuous season, winning nine games was a remarkable feat.

But more so, their character as Huskers and their commitment to Nebraska epitomized the pride of Cornhusker football. ■



The manner in which Solich handled the demands on his time in 1998 will serve to make him a better coach in the years to come.

Scott Bruhn

Bill Doleman's face is familiar to Cornhusker fans. He is host for several Nebraska-related television programs including the "Husker Show" and coaches' shows for Terry Pettit, Paul Sanderford and Frank Solich.

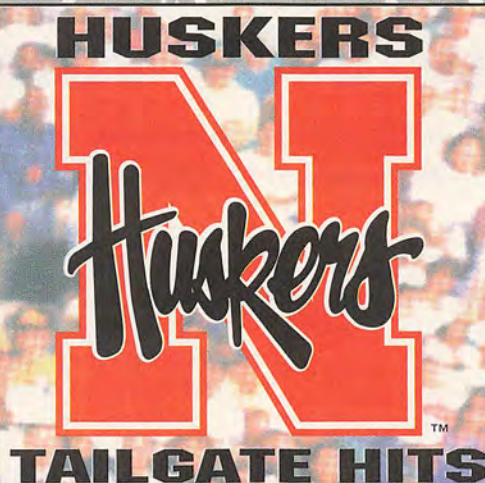
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Feeling Good About 9-3? You Bet

Granted, there will be no Big 12 Championship or trip to the Fiesta Bowl, but Frank Solich's team has no reason to hang its head over the 1998 record



Curt McKEEVER

HOW MANY first-year head college football coaches around the country do you think there are who can say they survived a 9-3 season?

I think you know the answer.

Nebraska's Frank Solich admitted to being "relieved" after watching his team sweat out a 16-14 win against Colorado the day after Thanksgiving to conclude a 9-3 regular-season campaign.

Solich even managed to joke that one would have to go back to his playing days to find the last Husker team that produced less than nine victories.

Well, maybe not that far back, but close.

Solich, who played at NU from 1963-65, had nothing to do with the Huskers going 6-4 in 1968. Back then, he was in his first year as Lincoln Southeast's football coach, and the Knights had even bigger problems — like a losing record.

So, as he takes some time out for NU's bowl preparations, maybe Solich will be reminded that things could certainly be a lot worse. And that maybe, just maybe, a 9-3 record is what Nebraska deserved this season.

Sure, the Huskers walloped Washington, 55-7, in that much-anticipated clash back in late September. But have you checked on the Huskies lately? They finished 6-5, barely qualifying as one of the three teams Nebraska beat this year that finished the regular season with a winning record.

Missouri (7-4) and Colorado (7-4) are the other two, and as you all know, the results of those games could have easily gone the other way as could have decisions against Oklahoma State (W), Texas A&M (L), Texas (L) and Kansas State (L).

Nebraska fans might not like their team being 9-3, but who can say the season hasn't been without major plot changes from week to week?

"We put a bunch of people on heart medicine this year," said tight end Sheldon Jackson, among those who think 9-3 is probably about right for this team. "The games we won, we earned. The games we lost, we were the better team on the whole, but they were the better team that day."

It's a coin flip as to who was better in the Nebraska-Colorado game. But if you were measuring heart, give the edge to the Huskers. The desire was especially demonstrated by a senior group that was staring at a second straight

home loss after not experiencing their first until their next-to-last performance in Memorial Stadium.

"I tried to downplay it to myself a little bit," Solich admitted. "Every time these players turned around this year, there was (a streak) like that being thrown at them."

But once the streak was secured, Solich sure seemed more at ease.

"We weren't far away from being able to get the whole thing done, and I think it's important that our kids understand that," he said. "There are some times when balls just aren't going to bounce your way."

Solich was quick to point out some bounces that have gone in favor of the Huskers — like last year's miracle against Missouri or even the onside kicks that nearly brought Colorado back from defeat against NU last season.

"It's such a fine line between losing two or three games and winning them all like that team did last year," Solich said.

After Nebraska lost to Texas three games ago, the Huskers were in danger of tanking the season. Instead, they responded like champions, coming one drive short of beating the then-No. 1 team in the country — Kansas State.

Now they're in position to end up with the second-best record of all Big 12 Conference teams.

The bowl trip is sure to be another fun one for NU fans. But for the Huskers, there will be too much at stake to take a vacation. Just like it was for the Thanksgiving leftover game against Colorado.

"They never step on the field without wanting to get it done, and this bowl game gives them another chance to help their

record out," Solich said. "I'm sure they'll prepare tremendously hard for this one."

"This'll be our national championship. That's how we'll approach it."

The good news after Friday is that the bowl game won't have to salvage a season. Even if it is only 9-3.

"It's been some year," Solich said

"I think if I look at everything that happened with this football team throughout the course of the season I feel good about them being 9-3." ■



Sheldon Jackson said he and his Husker teammates put a "bunch of people on heart medicine this year."

Joe Lindfield

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

Last-Minute Shopping?

BOOKS

Sports Publishing Inc. and *The Lincoln Journal Star* have joined in publishing *The Best of the Big Red Running Backs*, a collection of original and previously published stories about 20 great Nebraska running backs, from Lloyd Cardwell and Sam Francis to Mike Rozier and Frank Solich.

The 170-page coffee table book is liberally illustrated with photographs from the *Journal Star* library.

In addition to a regular issue, \$29.95 edition, Sports Publishing Inc. has produced a limited leatherbound edition of 500, autographed by Francis, Solich, Rozier, Roger Craig, I.M. Hipp and Ahman Green. The leatherbound edition sells for \$129.95.

Sports Publishing Inc. and the *Journal Star* also collaborated on *A Salute to Nebraska's Tom Osborne*.

Both books can be ordered by calling 1-800-327-5557 or contacting Sports Publishing Inc. at its website (www.sportspublishinginc.com).

MUSIC

"Dr. Tom, won't you save me a seat/so I can watch the bug eaters repeat?/Herbie Husker with me in the stands/whoa Nebraskaland."

Lincoln-born, Los Angeles-based singer/rapper Janel Rap's third solo recording, which was released in September, has a Cornhusker flavor, as the title of the 12-song CD suggests: *Sea of Red*.

"I always feel connected to where I've been, but growing up in Lincoln is special," Rap recently told the *Omaha World-Herald*. "I've learned how to stick to something to see it through."

The album's "Sea of Red" title track is a tribute to the Cornhusker football program and retired Hall of Fame coach Tom Osborne. A portion of the proceeds from album sales is being donated to Osborne's TEAM-MATES mentoring program and the St. Elizabeth's Children's Fund in Lincoln.

Sea of Red was released by Evening Star Music Group, Inc. (www.eveningstar1.com). ■

BIG 12 NEWS

Notes And Quotes From Around The League

LOOKING AHEAD TO 1999

With football's 1998 regular season now in the books, Big 12 Conference officials are already mapping out plans for next season. Sources confirm that these are some of the schedule changes you could be hearing about in the next few weeks:

- Kansas City, Mo., officials were so pumped up about the excitement and revenue generated by the Nebraska-Oklahoma State game at Arrowhead Stadium that they want another Big 12 matchup in 1999. That means the Big 12 needs to come up with a team that has as loyal a fan following as Nebraska. The Cornhuskers had so many ticket requests for the OSU game that they could have sold out Arrowhead by themselves.

Which school could match Nebraska's Big Red invasion? Go to the head of the class if you said Kansas State. That's why you should look for the Wildcats' Purple Pride to flow through Kansas City's streets the last weekend in September. Insiders say Iowa State officials are in favor of moving their Sept. 25 home game against the Wildcats to Arrowhead Stadium, the home of the Kansas City Chiefs.

- Oklahoma State and Oklahoma officials have been working since last spring on a plan to make their Bedlam Battle a fixture on Thanksgiving weekend. It took some schedule tweaking that also involved Baylor, but the deal is done.

When it becomes official, look for next season's OSU-OU game to move from Oct. 16 to the Saturday after Thanksgiving. But both schools would agree to switching the game to Thanksgiving Day or that Friday if it means a television appearance.

Baylor, meanwhile, has agreed to move its Nov. 26 game at Oklahoma up to Sept. 18. That contest would be the Big 12 opener for both the Bears and Sooners.

SHORT SHOTS

- Speculation surfaced shortly after **Bob Stoops** was hired to replace **John Blake** at Oklahoma that he wanted Nebraska quarterbacks coach **Turner Gill** as his offensive coordinator. Sources on the Nebraska staff confirmed that Stoops had contacted Gill several weeks ago about a position in the event that Stoops did indeed land a head coaching position. But Gill, a standout Nebraska quarterback in the 1980s under coach **Tom Osborne**, said that he plans to stay with the Cornhuskers.

- **Dat Nguyen**, Texas A&M's All-America linebacker, doesn't have a Heisman Trophy vote. But if he did, Nguyen said he'd vote for Texas running back **Ricky Williams**. The classy Nguyen admitted that after the Longhorns spoiled A&M's season by upsetting the Aggies. "All along I've said Ricky had my vote," Nguyen said. "He's on a level to himself."

- Texas A&M coach **R.C. Slocum** fired back at critics who criticized him after the Texas loss. Slocum said he's tired of hearing his team can't win big games. "We have won a bunch of big games. This team has won 10 straight football games without a break. Along there, there were a lot of games that could be classified as big games. If we had lost an opening game, and a game in the middle of the year, we would all be very happy. We lost a two-point game in the conference to a team that probably has the Heisman Trophy winner. I don't think there is any embarrassment in losing that game."

- Kansas hoops coach **Roy Williams** said forward **Lester Earl** could be slowed all season because of knee surgery he had last spring. "People don't understand how severe, how serious the surgery was that he had back in May," Williams said. "It's a long process. He's still not released to do much more than 50 percent of practice, and we've tried to limit him to about 20 minutes in games. It might be that way all year. He's trying very hard and doing the right things, but right now that knee just does not allow him to do the things he has done in the past."

- Kansas State guard **Ayome "Paco" May** will go to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., to seek an answer to an intestinal ailment that has bothered him for several years. "Clearly, he has a disorder, and we'd like to get to the bottom of it," K-State coach **Tom Asbury** said. "He's going to finish the season, unless he is just so decimated with this illness that he can't play. It's strictly his call. I wouldn't blame him if he quit, but I think he's pretty much made the decision that he's going to finish it out." ■ —



Turner Gill turned down an offer to become offensive coordinator at Oklahoma under new head coach Bob Stoops.

Arizona Pricked By Rose's Thorn

Rose Bowl disappointment doesn't taint Wildcats' excitement of facing Nebraska in the Holiday Bowl

By Shawn HEILBRON

The Arizona football players who gathered together at offensive tackle Yusuf Scott's house to watch UCLA take on Miami on Dec. 5 were in a celebratory mood.

Who could blame them? All No. 2-ranked UCLA had to do was beat Miami, a team that had been beaten senseless in a 66-13 shellacking at the hands of Syracuse

the week before, and Arizona was guaranteed of its first-ever Rose Bowl berth.

By the time the players left Scott's house that afternoon, they shared the feeling Charlie Brown had every time he went to kick the ball, only to have Lucy pull it away from him at the last second — close, but no cigar.

When Miami running back Edgerrin James

crossed the goal line in the final minute of the Hurricanes' season finale against UCLA, he created a ripple effect that shook the foundation of the Bowl Championship Series pecking order. His touchdown gave Miami an unthinkable 49-45 upset win and knocked Pac-10 champion UCLA out of the national title game and into the Rose Bowl, which sent Arizona to San Diego to take on Nebraska in the Culligan Holiday Bowl.

"Obviously, all our fans, players and staff are very disappointed that we didn't get to go to the Rose Bowl because we felt we were very deserving," Arizona head coach Dick Tomey said. "But we understood that we didn't control our own destiny."

Destiny appeared to be on Tomey and the Wildcats' side. They put together the best season in school history, finishing with an 11-1 record. An Oct. 10 loss to UCLA was the Wildcats' only stumble on an otherwise smooth sprint through the 1998 season.

With the Wildcats' still nursing the effects of their Rose Bowl letdown, they know their matchup against Nebraska in the Holiday Bowl is one that offers them a chance for redemption against one of college football's elite programs.

"Obviously, to play Nebraska is

NEBRASKA
(9-3)

VS

ARIZONA
(11-1)



Mike RUCKER



Chris MCALISTER

December 30, 1998 • 7:00 p.m. (CST)
Qualcomm Stadium • San Diego, Calif.

ARIZONA

1998 Results

S3	@ Hawaii	W, 27-6
S12	@ Stanford	W, 31-14
S19	Iowa	W, 35-11
S25	@ San Diego St.	W, 35-16
O3	@ Washington	W, 31-28
O10	UCLA	L, 52-18
O17	@ Oregon St.	W, 19-17
O24	NE Louisiana	W, 45-7
O31	Oregon	W, 38-3
N7	Washington St.	W, 41-7
N14	@ California	W, 27-23
N27	Arizona St.	W, 50-42

something our players will look forward to. It's the most outstanding program nationally over the last 20 to 25 years," Tomey said. "They've had some injury problems, but we realize it will be a very tough game. We watched them play Washington. They took Washington, a bowl team that's going to Hawaii this year (to face Air Force in the Oahu Bowl), apart at the seams."

Washington and California were

Tentative 2 Deeps

NEBRASKA OFFENSE

SE 6	Kenny Cheatham***	6-4	210	Sr.
-or- 3	Matt Davison*	6-0	180	So.
LT 69	Adam Julch*	6-5	315	Jr.
-or- 72	Ben Gessford*	6-2	290	Sr.
LG 63	James Sherman**	6-2	295	Jr.
-or- 54	Dominic Raiola	6-2	300	Fr.
C 59	Josh Heskew***	6-3	290	Sr.
54	Dominic Raiola	6-2	300	Fr.
RG 55	Russ Hochstein*	6-3	280	So.
51	Matt Baldwin*	6-1	290	Jr.
RT 65	Jason Schwab*	6-1	300	Jr.
72	Ben Gessford*	6-2	290	Sr.
TE 88	Sheldon Jackson***	6-4	245	Sr.
87	Tracey Wistrom	6-4	215	Fr.
QB 7	Eric Crouch	6-0	200	Fr.
9	Monte Christo**	6-0	195	Sr.
FB 45	Joel Makovicka***	5-11	240	Sr.
15	Willie Miller*	6-0	230	So.
IB 36	Correll Buckhalter*	6-0	225	So.
34	Dan White	5-9	195	Fr.
WB 5	Shevin Wiggins**	5-11	200	Sr.
-or- 14	Lance Brown***	5-11	190	Sr.
PK 35	Kris Brown**	5-10	205	Sr.

NEBRASKA DEFENSE

LR 57	Chad Kelsay***	6-3	250	Sr.
83	Kyle Vanden Bosch*	6-4	260	So.
NT 99	Jason Wiltz**	6-4	310	Sr.
96	Steve Warren**	6-1	305	Jr.
DT 91	Loran Kaiser*	6-5	280	So.
90	Jeremy Slechta	6-5	255	Fr.
RR 84	Mike Rucker***	6-5	250	Sr.
81	Aaron Wills	6-2	240	Jr.
SLB 37	Tony Ortiz	6-0	215	Jr.
-or- 46	Brian Shaw**	6-1	215	Jr.
MLB 44	Jay Foreman***	6-1	240	Sr.
13	Carlos Polk*	6-3	245	So.
WLB 1	Eric Johnson**	6-1	205	Sr.
50	Julius Jackson**	6-0	235	Jr.
LCB 16	Erwin Swiney*	6-0	185	So.
3	Keyuo Craver	6-0	180	Fr.
FS 19	Clint Finley*	5-11	200	So.
14	Dion Booker	6-1	205	Fr.
ROY 21	Mike Brown**	5-10	205	Jr.
25	Joe Walker*	5-10	200	So.
RCB 22	Ralph Brown**	5-9	180	Jr.
18	Jeff Hemje	6-0	185	Fr.
P 23	Bill Lafleur***	5-11	200	Sr.

Tentative 2 Deeps

ARIZONA DEFENSE

DE 99	Joe Tafoya*	6-4	255	So.
54	Alex Luna	6-1	224	Fr.
DT 48	Daniel Greer**	6-2	264	Sr.
94	James Lewis*	6-5	280	Jr.
DT 56	Keoni Frazier	6-0	287	Fr.
58	Anthony Thomas*	6-1	282	So.
DE 55	Mike Robertson	6-2	225	So.
91	Eli Wnek	6-2	240	Fr.
OLB 31	DaShon Polk**	6-2	230	Jr.
82	Robert Bonillas***	6-1	233	Sr.
ILB 40	Marcus Bell*	6-2	231	Jr.
52	Adrian Koch*	5-8	212	So.
ILB 6	Scooter Sprotte**	5-11	219	Jr.
46	Stadford Glover*	6-0	230	Jr.
CB 5	Kelvin Hunter**	5-9	169	Jr.
24	Greg Payne Jr.	5-10	192	Jr.
SS 24	Greg Payne Jr.	5-10	192	Jr.
-or- 2	LaChaux Rich***	5-10	192	Sr.
FS 1	Rafael Jones**	5-10	193	Jr.
18	A.J. Brown	5-11	196	Fr.
CB 11	Chris McAlister**	6-1	206	Sr.
7	Charles Nash	5-10	184	Fr.
P 17	Ryan Springston*	5-11	210	Sr.

ARIZONA OFFENSE

WR 15	Jeremy McDaniel*	6-1	198	Sr.
19	Brandon Nash*	6-1	202	So.
LT 79	Edwin Mulitalo*	6-4	346	Sr.
76	Makai Freitas*	6-7	283	So.
LG 66	Steven Grace	6-2	271	Fr.
77	Makoa Freitas	6-4	280	Fr.
C 70	Bruce Wiggins*	6-3	275	So.
66	Steven Grace	6-2	271	Fr.
RG 72	Yusuf Scott**	6-3	337	Jr.
71	M.McFadden*	6-4	316	So.
RT 67	Manuia Savea	6-2	296	Jr.
71	M.McFadden*	6-4	316	So.
TE 88	Mike Lucky**	6-7	274	Sr.
90	B. Manumaleuna*	6-2	286	So.
QB 12	Keith Smith**	5-11	202	Jr.
-or- 16	Ortega Jenkins*	6-2	224	So.
WR 8	Dennis Northcutt**	5-11	172	Jr.
13	Brad Brennan**	5-10	173	Jr.
RB 30	Trung Candidate*	5-11	199	Jr.
38	Kelvin Eafon**	5-11	217	Sr.
RB 38	Kelvin Eafon**	5-11	217	Sr.
32	Paul Shields*	6-1	229	Sr.
PK 39	Mark McDonald**	6-1	200	Jr.

two common opponents of Nebraska and Arizona this season. The Huskers defeated both of those teams by a combined score of 79-10, while the Wildcats mustered close wins in both games, winning by a combined score of 58-51. Of course, it should be noted that Arizona played Washington and Cal in road conference games, where the intensity is a little higher and the scores are a little tighter.

The strength of the Wildcat team is a balanced offensive attack that torched opposing defenses for 5,339 yards of total offense. First-year offensive coordinator Dino Babers has a holster loaded with a diverse collection of weapons.

At quarterback, it is safe to say that Arizona has a problem. The bad news for Nebraska is that the problem has nothing to do with poor play at the position. Arizona has two excellent quarterbacks who share the duties, and for Tomey, deciding which one to play is like asking Jerry Seinfeld if he'd rather go to the coffee shop with Kramer or George Costanza.

Keith Smith and Ortege Jenkins combine to form the two-headed monster under center for the Wildcats. Smith is the better passer of the two, but Jenkins is one of the most exciting players in all of college football. A Wildcat basketball player last season, Jenkins provided the play of the year in college football when he somersaulted over three Washington defenders into the end zone to propel Arizona to their win over the Huskies on the game's final play.

If Jenkins does have a deficiency, it is in the passing game. He completed just over 49 percent of his passes this season, compared to 68.5 for Smith. When Jenkins is in the game, the Wildcats like to move him out of the pocket and give him the option to pull the ball down and take off if his receivers are covered downfield.

Like Nebraska, Arizona doesn't throw a lot. Then again, when you have the conference's leading rusher in your backfield, why would you?

Besides having one of college football's most unique names, Trung Canidate is a unique run-

POSITIONAL ANALYSIS

Who Has The Edge?

QUARTERBACK



Eric Crouch has demonstrated excellent leadership for the Huskers this season. He has also proven that he is more than capable of running Nebraska's multiple option offense. He has played well in big games.



Arizona counters with the tandem of **Keith Smith** and **Ortege Jenkins**. Both Wildcat quarterbacks are incredibly athletic and are capable of making huge plays through the air or on the ground.



EDGE

RUNNING BACK



The Huskers should forget about DeAngelo Evans returning and give the ball to **Correll Buckhalter** 25-30 times. He won't make anyone forget Ahman Green, but his 5.6-yard per carry average is solid.



Trung Canidate led the Pac-10 in rushing and is a breakaway threat once he crosses the line of scrimmage. Fullback **Kelvin Eafon** scored a team-high 16 touchdowns and is a powerful lead blocker.



EDGE

WIDE RECEIVER/TIGHT END



Sheldon Jackson is one of the best pass-catching tight ends in the country. He always comes through in big games. **Matt Davison**, **Shevin Wiggins** and **Kenny Cheatham** are steady, although underused, receivers.



The Wildcats have a pair of big-play men in **Daniel Northcutt** and **Jeremy McDaniel**. Those two combined for 121 receptions, while everyone else combined for 64 catches. Shutting down the dynamic duo is key.



EDGE

OFFENSIVE LINE



The Huskers have battled injuries and inexperience all season. Through it all, senior center **Josh Heskew** has been the glue that has held this unit together. They should give a spirited effort against Arizona.



Guard **Yusuf Scott**, a first-team All-Pac-10 selection, is a human mountain at 6-3, 337 pounds. The Wildcats have tremendous depth along the offensive line, and they will need every bit of it against Nebraska's Blackshirts.



EDGE

DEFENSIVE LINE



Chad Kelsay and **Mike Rucker** have provided solid senior leadership, as well as strong play, all season. **Loran Kaiser** has been a solid surprise, while true freshmen **Jason Lohr** and **Jeremy Slechta** are for real.



Daniel Greer is the headliner, but a player to watch is true freshman **Keoni Fraser**. Starting next to Greer, Fraser has been impressive. **Joe Tafoya** and **Mike Robertson** are solid ends who combined for 11 sacks.



EDGE

LINEBACKERS



Jay Foreman needs three tackles to get to 100 for the season. He and his fellow linebackers will all have a chance to put up huge numbers against Trung Canidate and Arizona's high-octane running game.



If the Huskers are to have any success on the ground, they must get by **Marcus Bell**. Bell made 21 stops in the Wildcats' season finale, and along with **DaShon Polk** and **Scooter Sprotte**, make up a solid unit.



EDGE

SECONDARY



The Husker defensive backs were inconsistent early but showed tremendous poise as the season wound down. Rover **Mike Brown** and corner **Ralph Brown** lead a group that has something to prove.



A three-time first-team All-Pac-10 selection, **Chris McAlister** is one of the nation's top cover corners. College quarterbacks avoid him the way pro signal-callers do **Deion Sanders**. **Kelvin Hunter** is the man on the spot.



EDGE

SPECIAL TEAMS



If the game is close, Nebraska has a not-so-secret weapon in kicker **Kris Brown**. Punter **Bill Lafleur** could play a huge role in the field position battle, as Arizona's offense can strike fast when playing with a short field.



The special teams have been solid — the Wildcats' allow just 5.7 yards per punt return — but the kicking game has given the Wildcats' fits. **Mark McDonald** has converted less than 50 percent of his field goal attempts.



EDGE

ner. The junior led the Pac-10 with 1,220 rushing yards and averaged an eye-popping 7.3 yards per carry. He possesses breakaway speed, as well as the ability to elude would-be tacklers with a sleek array of moves. In the Wildcats' 50-42 season-ending win over Arizona State, Canidate erupted for a school-record 288 yards, including scoring scampers 80, 66 and 48 yards. The double-edged sword that the Huskers hope to safely handle is that if they commit too many people to try and stop the run, Arizona can get their receivers matched up in man coverage and look for big plays through

other hand, only allowed 30 or more points once.

Like the Wildcats, Nebraska has kept scoreboard operators busy all season. Eric Crouch has proven to be effective in his first season of action, leading the Huskers to a 4-1 record in his five starts.

In the event that Crouch has not met Arizona linebacker Marcus Bell, he might want to seek him out prior to kickoff, because Bell might not be as pleasant when he introduces himself to Crouch during the game.

Bell is a one-man wrecking ball in Arizona's 4-3 defense and is capable of

able to win the battle up front and allow Crouch time to throw downfield. When Crouch does throw, he will have to contend with a very good Wildcat secondary.

One of the top cornerbacks in the country, senior Chris McAlister has picked off five passes this season and, like Nebraska rover Joe Walker, is just one of six players to return an interception, a punt and a kickoff for a touchdown in the same season.

As most Pac-10 teams have learned, it is best to throw to the side opposite of where McAlister is lined up. If Nebraska sticks to that plan, Kelvin Hunter will see the majority of passes thrown his way. At just 5-9, Hunter is lightning-fast, but he can be outmuscled by the bigger Husker receivers. He has two interceptions to his credit, but if he finds himself matched up against 6-4 split end Kenny Cheatham, he will get picked on worse than a 12-year-old on his first day of junior high.

It is more likely, however, that McAlister will match up against Cheatham, meaning Shevin Wiggins and Matt Davison will see more balls thrown their way.

In addition to his prowess in the secondary, McAlister is a dangerous return man — when he touches the ball, that is. He only returned five punts this year, but averaged 20.8 yards per runback — over nine yards better than Northcutt, Arizona's primary return specialist.

While both teams are strong in the return game, Nebraska has a clear advantage in the kicking department. Arizona kicker Mark McDonald is as reliable as a to-go order at a fast food restaurant — you never know what you are going to get. McDonald hit on just eight of 17 field goal attempts and was just 6-of-13 in the 20- to 39-yard range.

Nebraska's senior duo of kicker Kris Brown and punter Bill Lafleur are as good as any kicking tandem in the country, and if the game is close, it could spell trouble for Arizona.

While the Wildcat players experienced a rude awakening from their sweet dreams of a trip to Pasadena, there is no reason to expect a letdown. A win against Nebraska on Dec. 30 would be the perfect tonic to cure Arizona's Rose Bowl blues.

"Every game is important, but certainly a bowl game gives you a chance to finish on a high note versus a good opponent," Tomey said. "To win a game against a great team like Nebraska would be big for our program." ■



the air.

Arizona receivers Dennis Northcutt and Jeremy McDaniel combined for 1,838 yards and 15 touchdowns this season. At 5-foot-11, 170 pounds, Northcutt is not big physically, but he has big-play potential every time he touches the ball — which is something he does a lot. In addition to grabbing a team-high 63 passes, Northcutt also returned punts and kickoffs for the Wildcats and led the team in all-purpose yards with 1,647.

So, how does Nebraska stop Arizona's skill players? That is a question Frank Solich and his staff will have a difficult time answering. One solution is to bring a heavy dose of pressure, forcing Smith or Jenkins to make quick reads. What the Husker defense hopes to avoid is the big play, and bringing pressure will only work if the Huskers can get to the quarterback before he leaves the pocket. Once Smith or Jenkins gets outside the pocket, all bets are off.

Arizona can put up points in a hurry. The Wildcats scored 30 or more points in eight of their 11 games this season. Nebraska's defense, on the

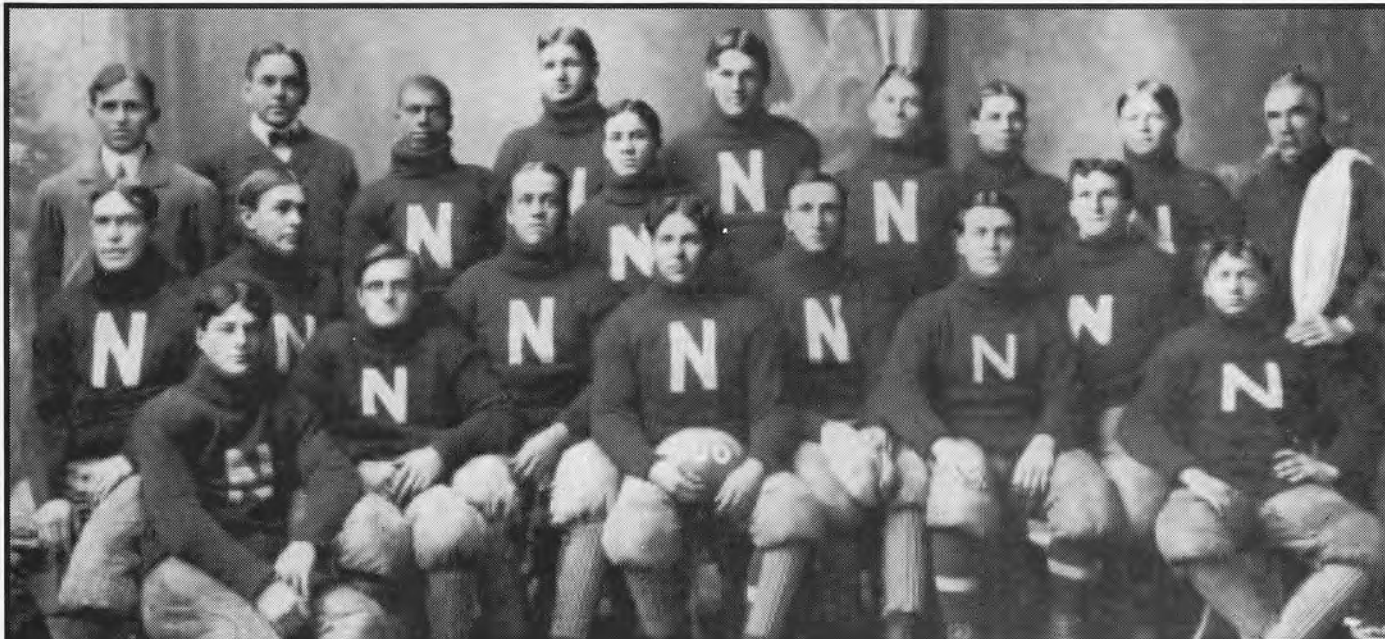
The Pac-10's leading rusher with 1,220 yards, Arizona's Trung Canidate is an elusive runner whose style is as unique as his name.

single-handedly reducing Nebraska's inconsistent running game to rubble. The junior inside linebacker led the Wildcats with 139 tackles, including 14 for 51 yards in losses. The 6-2, 231-pound Bell has a nose for the football the way Wimpy does for hamburgers — and like Wimpy, Bell makes other people pay.

Playing alongside Bell are linebackers DaShon Polk and Scooter Sprotte, two hard-hitting juniors who combined for 114 tackles, including 20 that went for losses. All of the Arizona linebackers are very good in pass coverage, which will be key in defending Nebraska tight end Sheldon Jackson.

Up front, the Wildcats have traded size for speed and are led by tackle Daniel Greer, who has a team-high nine sacks. At 6-2, 264 pounds, Greer is the best package of athletic talent on the defensive line.

Nebraska's offensive line should be

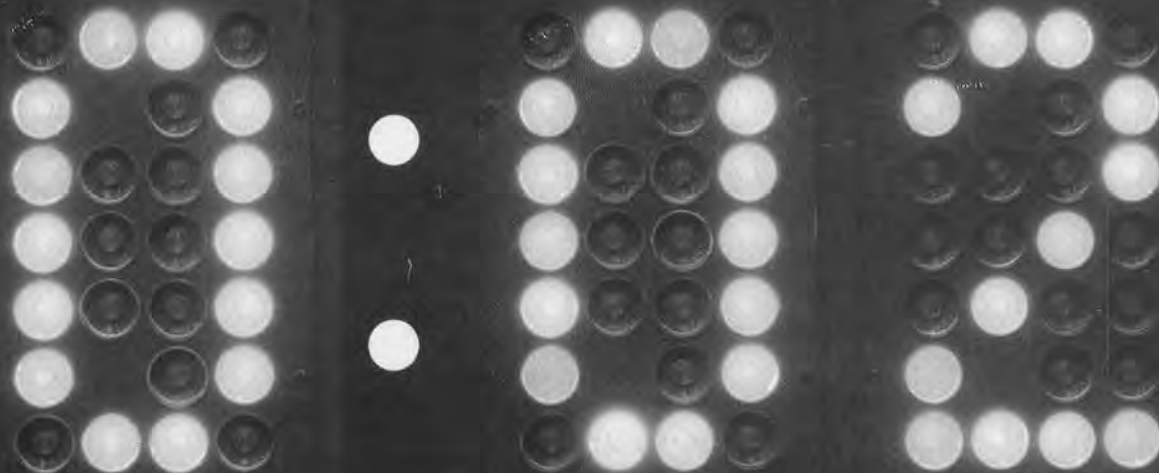


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BY THE NUMBERS

Colorado vs Nebraska
Nov. 27, 1998 • Lincoln, Nebraska

Score By Quarters

Colorado	7	0	7	0	—	14
Nebraska	7	3	3	3	—	16

Team Stats

	CU	NU
First Downs	18	12
Rushing	11	6
Passing	5	6
Penalty	2	0
Rushing Attempts	46	37
Yards Gained Rushing	180	154
Yards Lost Rushing	68	23
Net Yards Rushing	112	131
Net Yards Passing	134	123
Passes Attempted	19	22
Passes Completed	13	10
Had Intercepted	1	1
Total Plays	65	59
Total Net Yards	246	254
Avg. Gain Per Play	3.8	4.3
Fumbles-Lost	3-2	2-1
Penalties-Yards	7-78	5-44
Punts-Yards	5-196	5-255
Avg. Per Punt	39.2	51.0
Punt Returns-Yards	3-43	3-20
Interceptions-Yards	1-0	1-42
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	1-2	2-42
Possession Time	33:42	26:18



Seniors Josh Heskew and Joel Makovicka will wrap up great careers at Nebraska with the Holiday Bowl.

Individual Leaders

NEBRASKA

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Buckhalter, C.	15	92	6.1	52	0
Makovicka, J.	5	21	4.2	11	0
Crouch, E.	17	18	1.1	4	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	10-22-1	45.5	123	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Wiggins, S.	3	42	14.0	24	0
Buckhalter, C.	3	29	9.7	21	0
Davison, M.	2	31	15.5	27	0
Jackson, S.	1	11	11.0	11	0
Cheatham, K.	1	10	10.0	10	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	Att.	Good	LNG
Brown, K.	4	3	30

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	2	13	6.5	12	0
Wiggins, S.	1	7	7.0	7	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	1	22	22.0	22	0
Wiggins, S.	1	20	20.0	20	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Brown, M.	4	7	11	0	0	0
Foreman, J.	3	8	11	1-4	0	5-4
Kelsay, C.	3	5	8	3-15	0	1.5-12
Brown, R.	6	1	7	0	0	0
Rucker, M.	4	3	7	2-12	0	1.5-12
Swiney, E.	5	1	6	0	0	0
Jackson, J.	2	4	6	0	0	0
Walker, J.	0	4	4	0	0	0
Ortiz, T.	0	4	4	0	0	0
Johnson, E.	2	1	3	1-10	0	1-10
Shaw, B.	0	3	3	0	0	0
Finley, C.	0	3	3	0	1-42	0
Craver, S.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Wiltz, K.	0	1	2	0	0	0
Wiltz, J.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Stechta, J.	1	0	1	1-4	0	5-4

COLORADO

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Barnes, M.	15	102	4.1	12	0
Cherrington, D.	6	39	6.5	15	0
Johnson, C.	2	4	2.0	2	0
Moschetti, M.	13	-33	-2.5	10	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Moschetti, M.	12-18-1	66.7	132	2
Johnson, C.	1-1-0	100.0	2	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Green, J.	5	72	14.4	18	1
Stiggers, M.	4	25	6.3	8	0
Peeke, A.	1	15	15.0	15	1
Johnson, C.	1	13	13.0	13	0
Cherrington, D.	1	7	7.0	7	0
Moschetti, M.	1	2	2.0	2	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	Att.	Good	LNG
Aldrich, J.	1	0	0

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Kelly, B.	2	4	2.0	7	0
Lewis, M.	1	39	39.0	39	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Ashworth, T.	1	2	2.0	2	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Sykes, J.	7	6	13	2-15	0	1-8
Cade, T.	3	6	9	0	0	0
Navies, H.	4	3	7	1-2	0	0
Washington, M.	3	3	6	0	0	0
Loper, I.	2	2	4	1-3	0	0
Wheeler, D.	1	3	4	0	0	0
Sanders, J.	0	4	4	0	0	0
Kelly, B.	1	3	4	0	1-0	0
Bannan, J.	0	3	3	0	0	0
Jones, F.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Jarne, S.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Ziegler, N.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Southward, B.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Warren, J.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Wright, N.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Barnes, R.	0	1	1	0	0	0

'98 SEASON STATS

RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Buckhalter, C.	12	142	799	66.6	8
Crouch, E.	8	96	459	57.4	5
Makovicka, J.	12	97	458	38.2	2
Alexander, D.	9	70	369	41.0	4
Newcombe, B.	6	83	228	38.0	0
Christo, M.	7	59	223	31.9	3
Evans, D.	3	38	218	72.7	4
Milroy, W.	12	19	96	8.0	2
Runty, J.	4	3	59	14.8	0
Wiggins, S.	12	8	47	3.9	0
Legate, B.	11	5	28	2.5	1
White, D.	6	7	27	4.5	0
Brown, L.	6	1	13	2.2	0
Kingston, B.	3	3	9	3.0	0
Soucie, T.	6	1	7	1.2	0
Tillery, A.	1	1	3	3.0	0
Grager, N.	1	1	3	3.0	0
Stanislav, J.	1	1	1	1.0	0
London, F.	7	1	-2	-0.3	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	8	49-101-4	48.5	601	4
Newcombe, B.	6	50-79-1	63.3	712	1
Christo, M.	7	19-28-0	67.9	261	2

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	12	32	394	12.3	32.8	0
Wiggins, S.	12	22	326	14.8	27.2	1
Jackson, S.	12	19	343	18.1	28.6	4
Cheatham, K.	9	13	155	11.9	17.2	1
Buckhalter, C.	12	13	88	6.8	7.3	0
Haafke, B.	12	6	54	9.0	4.5	0
Makovicka, J.	12	4	67	16.8	5.6	0
Brown, L.	6	3	24	8.0	4.0	0
Evans, D.	3	3	23	7.7	7.7	0
Wistrom, T.	12	2	84	42.0	7.0	1
Debates, T.J.	10	1	16	16.0	1.6	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, K.	12	21	14	48

DEFENSE

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Brown, M.	12	37	65	102	5-5	1-1	0
Foreman, J.	12	32	65	97	7-27	0	3-22
Kelsay, C.	12	33	39	72	14-52	1-0	5-39
Johnson, E.	12	33	37	70	11-52	0	6-41
Swiney, E.	12	32	29	61	4-16	0	2-12
Rucker, M.	12	21	32	53	9-21	0	1.5-12
Walker, J.	12	22	28	50	5-10	3-65	0
Ortiz, T.	11	20	26	46	9-28	0	1-3
Brown, R.	12	27	19	46	2-3	2-60	0
Kaiser, L.	12	16	24	40	10-27	0	5.5-21
Shaw, B.	12	12	27	39	4-11	0	1-5
Wiltz, J.	10	10	25	35	1-7	2-32	1-7
Finley, C.	9	6	22	28	3-13	3-63	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	12	10	18	28	4-36	0	2-29
Warren, S.	10	10	16	26	1-3	0	0
Jackson, J.	10	9	15	24	3-20	0	2-19
Craver, K.	11	10	13	23	0	1-0	0
Polk, C.	12	13	9	22	5-24	1-16	1-10
Willis, A.	11	5	5	10	0	0	0
Kohl, J.	12	4	6	10	1-3	0	0
Stechta, J.	8	3	6	9	3-11	0	1-7
Toline, T.	12	5	4	9	0	0	0
Reynolds, K.	6	5	3	8	1-5	0	0
Lohr, J.	11	5	2	7	1-6	0	1-6
Burrow, J.	12	2	2	4	0	0	0
Vedral, M.	6	1	2	3	0	0	0
Legate, B.	11	1	2	3	0	0	0
Woodward, W.	10	1	2	3	0	0	0
Watchorn, T.	9	1	2	3	0	0	0
Raymond, S.	3	3	0	3	0	0	0
McGraw, G.	11	1	2	3	0	0	0
Ryan, E.	3	0	2	2	1-2	0	0
Wichmann, J.P.	3	1	1	2	0	0	0
Booker, D.	11	2	0	2	0	0	0
Mehl, L.	1	0	1	1	1-3	0	0
Tuttle, C.	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
McGinn, M.	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Fischer, E.	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
Mooberry, B.	3	1	0	1	0	0	0
Hogrefe, Q.	1	0	1	1	0	0	0

TEAM STATISTICS

Total Offensive Yards	4619	3764				
Plays	844	813				
Average Per Play	5.5	4.6				
Average Per Game	384.9	313.7				
Net Rushing Yards	3045	1402				
Attempts	636	466				
TDs Rushing	37	8				
Net Passing Yards	1574	2362				
Attempts	208	347				
Completions	118	174				
Average Per Pass	7.6	6.8				
Average Per Catch	13.3	13.6				
Average Per Game	131.2	196.8				
TDs Passing	7	13				
Sacks By-Yards	33-233	20-146				
Fumbles-Lost	27-13	30-13				
Penalties-Yards	61-536	103-830				
Scoring	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	TOT
NU	83	106	89	105	0	383
Opponents	28	53	49	53	0	183



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By Mike BABCOCK

The finish to the final regular-season game was fitting. The outcome was in doubt until Nebraska stopped Colorado on fourth-and-15 from the Buffaloes' 26-yard line with 1:41 remaining (see pages 22-23 for complete game recap).

All-Big 12 cornerback Ralph Brown broke up a Mike Moschetti pass intended for Javon Green to preserve the 16-14 victory. Said oft-quoted Cornhusker tight end and co-captain Sheldon: "Some say this was the most exciting season they've seen around here in a long time."

And so it was. "It was very exciting," Jackson said, repeating himself.

Nebraska fans had become accustomed to last-second drama by the time Colorado came to Lincoln.

The outcomes of five other Cornhusker games had been in serious doubt late in the fourth quarter, with two of the five — both Nebraska victories — undecided until the final play.

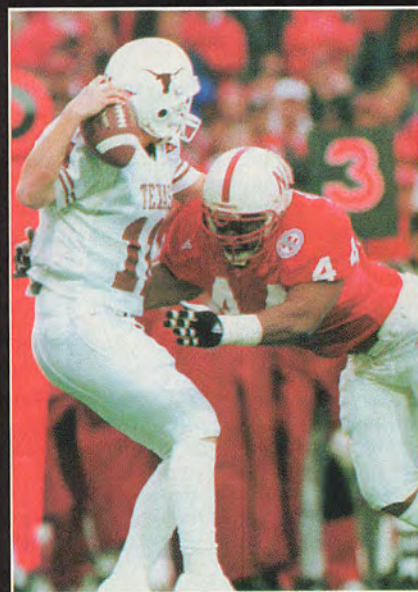
Rush end Mike Rucker stopped Oklahoma State's Nathan Simmons inside the 1-yard line to preserve a 24-17 victory as time ran out, and weakside linebacker Eric Johnson sacked Corby Jones for a 10-yard loss from the Cornhusker 22-yard line to preserve a 20-13 victory against Missouri.

On the next-to-last play, cornerback Erwin Swiney was credited with breaking up a Jones pass in the end zone. Such finishes are entertaining in victory, but frustrating in defeat, which Nebraska endured three times this season.

**With some luck
Nebraska could
have won one or
two more games.
With misfortune,
they could have
lost one or two
more. It was just
that kind of
a season**

Never A Dull Moment

Scott Bruhn



Frank Solich's first team wasn't as good as it looked against Washington or as bad as it looked against Texas; it was somewhere in the middle.

On a day in which the offense couldn't find the end zone, Nebraska held off Colorado to keep a 30-year streak alive

Nine The Hard Way



Josh Heskew knelt on the sideline with his head bowed during Colorado's final offensive series. "I don't think I watched a single play," he said. "I figured if I heard a big roar, it was good."

The Buffaloes began at their own 9-yard line, following a 58-yard punt by Bill Lafleur, who averaged 51 yards on five punts to set the Nebraska single-season record for punting average (44.9).

Ben Kelly was tackled by Travis Toline and Joel Makovicka for a 3-yard loss on the return. Only 2:57 remained on the clock, with Nebraska clinging to a 16-14 lead. "We knew we had to stop them," said rush end Mike Rucker, one of 21 Cornhusker seniors playing their final game at Memorial Stadium.

"They didn't have to get a touchdown. They just had to get in field goal range. That's (a field goal) something we knew could happen, so we wanted to get them stopped and get off the field."

Colorado started as if it would get into field goal range, with gains of 12 and 10 yards on its first two plays. But a false start penalty temporarily halted the Buffaloes' progress.

Then Chad Kelsay sacked quarterback Mike Moschetti for an 8-yard loss on second down, and two incomplete passes later, the threat had been aborted by the Blackshirts.

Heskew was able to look up as the Huskers' 227th consecutive sellout crowd roared.

The Cornhuskers were able to run out the final 1:41 on the clock and provide first-year head coach Frank Solich with his ninth victory in 12 games. He was both relieved and pleased.

"Right now 9-3, to me, sounds pretty good," he said. "We played a very tough schedule. We had a tremendous number of injuries. We had many big-play people taken out of the offense."

"The continuity throughout the season was not there. We had to ask a lot of young players, and they responded very, very well. Some of that comes back to the fact that they knew because of the tradition of this program and the pride factor that was expected of them."

Among the young players to whom Solich referred were defensive tackles Jeremy Slechta and Jason Lohr. Each was credited with a quarterback sack, and Slechta recovered a fumble at the Nebraska 42-yard line early in the fourth quarter to set up the Huskers' game-winning drive.

The Cornhuskers drove to the Colorado 8-yard line, where Kris Brown kicked his third field goal of the game, a 25-yarder with 8:48 remaining. It was redemption for the senior from Southlake, Texas, who missed, wide right, an attempt from 45 yards on Nebraska's first possession.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

The Cornhuskers' comeback attempt in a 28-21 loss at Texas A&M ended with a Bobby Newcombe pass interception on third-and-15 from the Nebraska 40-yard line with 51 seconds left.

Texas defeated Nebraska, 20-16, on a touchdown with 2:47 remaining, following a 14-play, 85-yard drive, then stopped them on fourth-and-6 at their own 49-yard line with 1:58 left.

And Kansas State took possession at the Nebraska 20-yard line, leading 34-30 after quarterback Eric Crouch was pulled down by the facemask for a 12-yard loss on fourth-and-8 with 2:32 left.

The Cornhuskers got the ball back at their own 18-yard line with 15 seconds remaining, but to no avail. Kansas State's Jeff Kelly picked up a Crouch fumble and scored to cap the 40-30 victory.

In some ways, that was the toughest loss of the three for a team that saw great expectations for coach Frank Solich's first season thwarted by injuries and inexperience — in no particular order.

The three losses were atypical of Nebraska, which lost only three games in the previous five seasons. The last time it lost three games in a season was 1990. The last time it lost three regular-season games was 1977. And the last time it lost three conference games in a season was 1976.

"It's a lot easier to play when you're on top," senior fullback Joel Makovicka said after the Colorado game. "It takes a lot of heart, a lot of pride, a lot of character when you're not on top."

"It's tough when you're at Nebraska and you lose some football games."

A 9-3 record — Nebraska's 30th consecutive nine-victory season — hardly constitutes failure. "Ninety-five percent of the programs around the country would be happy," said Makovicka.

"It's nice to see we didn't lay down, go in the tank when we lost a couple of games."

That the Cornhuskers continued to battle despite injuries to, among others, Newcombe and sophomore I-back DeAngelo Evans, was among the reasons they were enjoyable to coach, according to Solich.

"Every week come Monday, they stepped on the field ready

1998 Schedule/Record (9-3)

Aug. 29	vs. Louisiana Tech\$	W, 56-27
Sept. 5	Ala.-Birmingham	W, 38-7
Sept. 12	@ California	W, 24-3
Sept. 26	Washington	W, 55-7
Oct. 3	vs. Oklahoma St.&	W, 24-17
Oct. 10	@ Texas A&M	L, 28-21
Oct. 17	Kansas	W, 41-0
Oct. 24	Missouri	W, 20-13
Oct. 31	Texas	L, 20-16
Nov. 7	@ Iowa St.	W, 42-7
Nov. 14	@ Kansas St.	L, 40-30
Nov. 27	Colorado	W, 16-14
Dec. 30	vs. Arizona%	8 p.m. (EST) ESPN

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to go back to work," he said.

"Some of those Mondays they've come off losses where they've been tremendously disappointed. But yet, they seemed to take the approach they were going to move on, do the very best they could."

They've maintained that attitude as they prepare for the Holiday Bowl, Solich said.

Nebraska won the Colorado game with three Kris Brown field goals and a 42-yard interception return for a touchdown by safety Clint Finley. The last time the Cornhuskers won a game without scoring an offensive touchdown was before Bob Devaney became head coach in 1962.

The offense was inconsistent throughout the season.

"Overall, it's not been easy getting the ball in the end zone," Solich said prior to the Kansas State game. "We've had a couple of games where we got it done at a pretty high level. But we have not been as consistent as what teams have been in the past."

The statistics provide dramatic evidence of that. The Cornhuskers averaged only 384.9 yards per game, their lowest since 1969 (371.8). They averaged 31.9 points, their lowest since 1981 (31.7). And they averaged only 253.8 yards rushing, their lowest since 1976 (219.8).

Sophomore I-back Correll Buckhalter led the team in rushing, with 799 yards, the lowest total for Nebraska's leading rusher since 1975, when Monte Anthony gained 723 yards.

Buckhalter, who started seven games, began the season as the starter because Evans suffered a knee injury in the first major scrimmage of fall practice. Evans recovered to start against No. 8-ranked Washington and rushed for 146 yards and three touchdowns in the 55-7 victory.

The 146 rushing yards were an individual season high for Nebraska.

The next week, however, Evans suffered a bruised tailbone on his first carry against Oklahoma State. He started again a week later at Texas A&M, but he hasn't been able to play since.

Whether or not he'll play in the Holiday Bowl is a question Solich can't answer.

A healthy Evans would have provided the Cornhuskers with the big-play ability it lacked.

"We've not had as many big plays as some of our teams have had in the

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

After that, "I was a little down on myself," said Brown.

In addition to kicking the three field goals, Brown broke the NCAA record for successful extra-point kicks during a career, making No. 217 following sophomore free safety Clint Finley's 42-yard interception return for a touchdown less than four minutes into the game.

Brown played a key role in the victory, on an afternoon when the Cornhusker offense was held scoreless and managed only 254 yards, including a season-low 131 on the ground.

Nebraska's inability to run the ball "dictated some things (offensively)," Solich said. "But yet, you need to keep trying to establish that. And we did a little bit right on the first drive, I think, at the beginning of the second half. That helped us to some degree. But it was very, very difficult."

On the fifth play of the second half, sophomore I-back Correll Buckhalter broke an off-tackle play for 52 yards to the Colorado 3-yard line. But the Cornhuskers lost nine yards on the next two plays and, after an incomplete Eric Crouch pass, had to settle for the second of Brown's field goals — a 30-yarder.

That's how it was for Nebraska's offense most of the game.

And it was "very frustrating," said Solich. "One thing that usually comes back to haunt you is when you're not able to convert points when you do have the ball inside the 20 (yard line).

"We were fortunate that we were able to get it done with the fact that we did not get some points on the board on some crucial drives when we were in position to do it and didn't get it done."

One such time occurred four plays after Nebraska had taken a 13-7 lead. Rucker and senior middle linebacker Jay Foreman sacked Moschetti, forcing a fumble that was recovered by Kelsay at the Buffaloes' 19-yard line. But Crouch threw an interception on a second-down-and-11.

"There was a little bit of frustration," said Crouch, who started for a third consecutive time. "But you tend to forget about that stuff. You just go out and try to make the best of the situation. If something bad happens, you have to try to forget about it. It's not going to help you to dwell on anything."

The play of the Blackshirts made forgetting about offensive mistakes easier.

"I thought they rose to the occasion when it was really called for and the game was on the line," Solich said. "They stepped up and got it done. They're that kind of a group. They have that kind of talent to be able to do that, and I felt very pleased that they ended up getting it done in this ballgame."

Junior strong safety Mike Brown made 11 tackles, to bring his season's total to a team-leading 102. Foreman made nine tackles. And junior cornerback Ralph Brown was credited with seven tackles, as was Rucker.

Rucker also was involved in two quarterback sacks, his first of the season.

"I've struggled with my pass rush this year," he said. "I thought if I got a sack, I'd probably be going crazy. But I was really calm. I thought about my family when it happened, and I just thank the Lord for letting me be in that situation to get those two sacks and get that monkey off my back."

Rucker's lack of sacks this season was more a result of injury than ability. "The guy's a playmaker," Kelsay said. "It was nice to see him make plays. He was all worked up with the senior stuff."

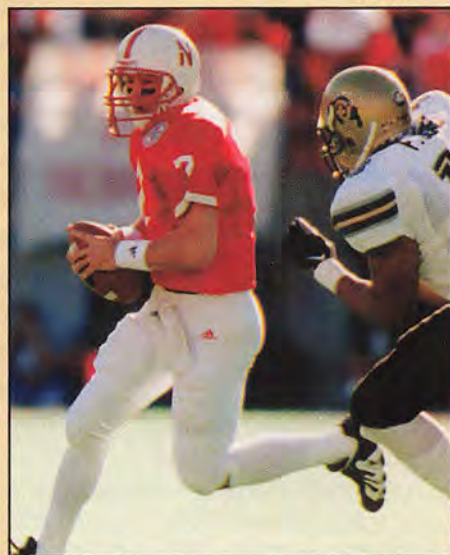
The "senior stuff" added a bittersweet note to the victory, on a warm day more typical of late September than the day after Thanksgiving. "I thought I wouldn't be emotional," said Foreman.

But he was, and so were his teammates. "It's kind of emotional walking off the field for the last time," said Makovicka. "I'm glad we could get this win for the last time we walked off the field."

Nebraska's string of nine-victory seasons is now at 30. The Cornhuskers are going to a bowl game for the 30th consecutive season, and they are ranked in the Associated Press poll for the 288th consecutive week, dating to mid-October of 1981. But most other streaks ended this season.

A winning streak at Memorial Stadium ended at 47 games. A regular-season conference winning streak ended at 40 games. An overall winning streak ended at 19 games. A streak of seasons with 11 or more victories ended at five. And a streak of major bowl game appearances will end at 17.

"I'm relieved we were able to get this win, get nine victories," said Solich. "They wanted that very badly throughout the course of the year, and certainly here lately when it became obvious you had to go back quite a ways — back to my era almost — to find a team that didn't get nine wins." ■



Despite a lack of offensive production against Colorado, Eric Crouch showed the ability to do the little things necessary to lead the Huskers to a victory.

past," Solich said.

"Without question, DeAngelo was a proven I-back in terms of big-play ability. And coming into this season, other than him, we did not have a truly proven I-back as far as big-play ability goes."

Sophomore I-back Dan Alexander got his first collegiate start at Iowa State and responded by rushing for 110 yards and three touchdowns. But he suffered a knee injury early in the Kansas State game and won't be available for the Holiday Bowl. He's hoping to return for spring practice.

An inexperienced line, which never clicked as expected, was largely responsible for the dropoff in offensive production, as was the week-to-week uncertainty at quarterback, where Solich started Newcombe (six games), Crouch (five games) and senior walk-on Monte Christo (one game).

"I think it's pretty obvious that if you're dealing with more than one guy underneath the center throughout most of the season, then it's probably not gone as smoothly as what you would like," said Solich. "In some ways, it's been very, very tough on us in that regard."

"But yet, you can look at it another way. This team has come through that. They've stayed together. Despite the fact we've had as many injuries as we've had at a key position, they did not fold at any given time. In some ways, that brought this team even closer together. They've had to pick it up."

With some luck, the Cornhuskers could have won one or two more games. With even more misfortune, they could have lost one or two more. It's been that kind of a season, rarely a dull moment.

"It's been what I expected," Solich said. "I knew pretty much what I was getting into. I knew it would not be easy. I knew I had some excellent athletes who were going to give it everything they had."

"I knew we had a coaching staff with a lot of continuity, and would also do the same. So I felt very good about taking over the position. Would I have liked some things to go a little smoother? Certainly, I would have. There are some things that did not get done in terms of a few games we did

not win.

"We would have liked to have gotten it done. There were some streaks that maybe were broken that weighed heavy on me, weighed heavy on us. But we've battled our way through all that."

"We've continued to move forward. As I look at it, I feel somewhat comfortable about the way everyone has responded within the program to make it the best season possible."

In some ways, Solich's first season as head coach has paralleled Tom Osborne's first season as head coach in 1973. Five games into the 1973 season, the Cornhuskers were ranked No. 2 in the Associated Press poll. But they dropped to 12th before finishing seventh, with a 9-2-1 record.

Both losses and the tie were in conference games.

Osborne hasn't intruded this season. In fact, he's been conspicuous by his absence from the program.

Even so, "we've talked occasionally during the season, (though) proba-

bly not as much as what maybe most people would think," Solich said before the Colorado game.

"Coach would drop by every now and then, just really come in and say hello, but in his fashion, not stay very long and would never want to feel like he was intruding or interrupting, as much as we enjoyed seeing him — many times those conversations were when the assistant coaches were also around."

"There were a few times throughout the course of the season that Coach and I talked personally, and there were some times, a couple of times, that I did ask Coach some questions about some things, asked how he saw things. But that was maybe a couple of times."

Osborne couldn't have had any solution to the injury problems, however, and he couldn't have alleviated the pressure that goes with being the Cornhuskers' head coach — and his successor.

"There's pressure," said Solich. "But I think the support has been tremendous."

And one thing is certain: Nebraska fans have gotten the most for their entertainment dollar this season. ■



Senior Josh Heskew was one of only three Huskers to be named first-team by The Associated Press.

All BIG 12 Selections

Nebraska placed three players on the Associated Press All-Big 12 first team. Center **Josh Heskew**, tight end **Sheldon Jackson** and cornerback **Ralph Brown** were so honored.

Heskew and Brown also were first-team all-conference according to the Big 12 coaches.

Jackson was second-team according to the coaches, along with rover **Mike Brown**, rush ends **Chad Kelsay** and **Mike Rucker**, kick returner **Joe Walker** and place-kicker **Kris Brown**. Walker, Kelsay, Rucker, **Mike Brown** and middle linebacker **Jay Foreman** were second-team AP selections.

Heskew, a two-year starter, and Jackson are seniors and co-captains. Ralph Brown is a junior.

Jackson was third on the team in pass receptions with 19 for 343 yards and four touchdowns, a team high. His 18.1 yards per reception also were a team-high (for a minimum of five receptions).

Ralph Brown was involved in 46 tackles, including 27 unassisted and two for losses. He intercepted two passes and broke up 14, a Cornhusker single-season record.

The Cornhuskers' three first-team all-conference selections were the fewest in 30 years. The last time Nebraska had fewer than three first-team all-conference players was in 1961, when only one Cornhusker, fullback **Bill "Thunder" Thornton**, was so honored. Nebraska averaged eight first-team all-conference honorees during **Tom Osborne's** 25 seasons as coach, with a high of 13 in 1988.

The conference had four fewer teams in all but two of those 25 seasons, of course.

The coaches' third team included punter **Bill Laffleur** and kick returner **Shevin Wiggins**.

Senior **Joel Makovicka** received honorable mention from the coaches. Neither the coaches nor the AP included a fullback, however. ■

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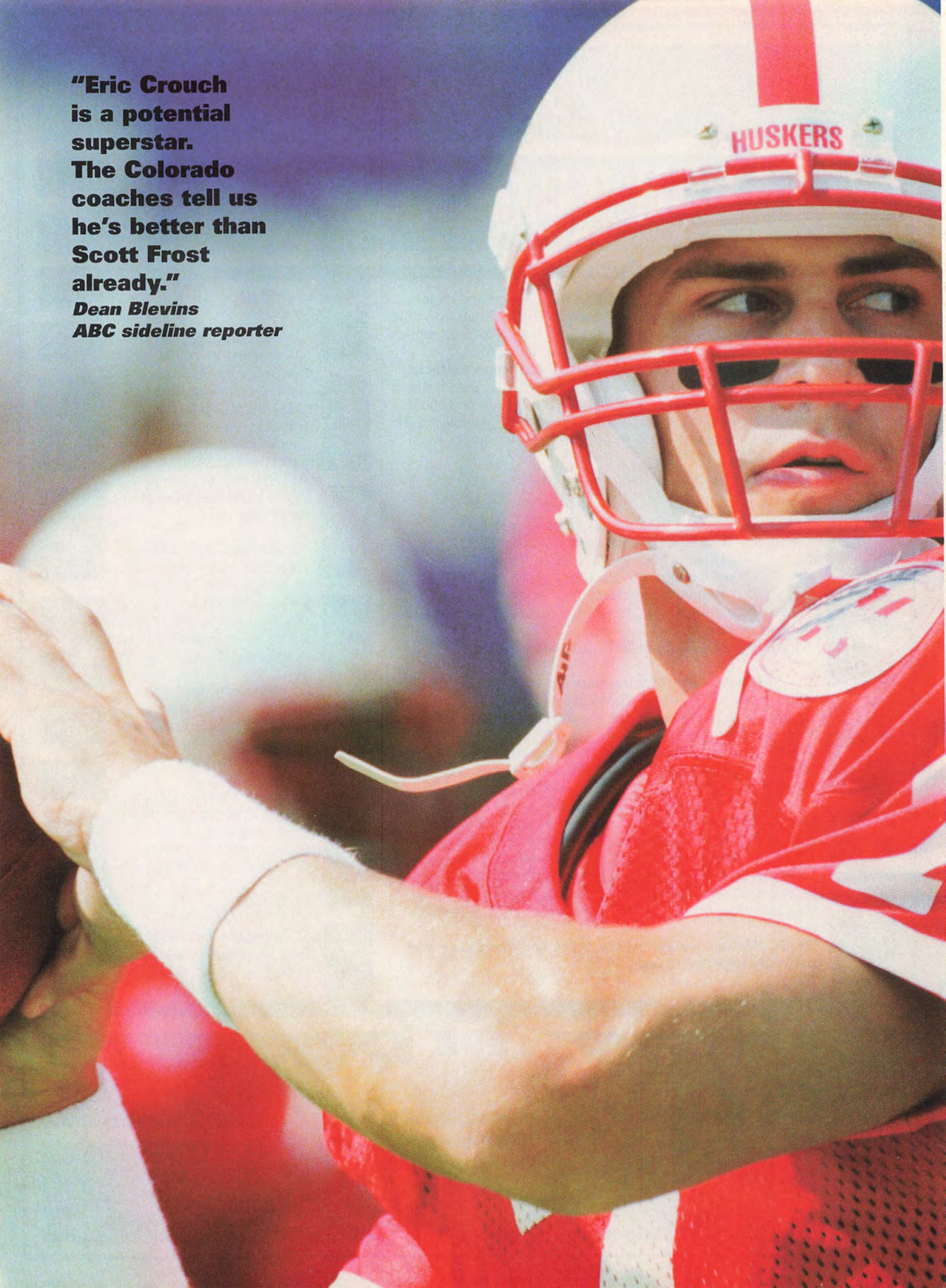
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**"Eric Crouch
is a potential
superstar.
The Colorado
coaches tell us
he's better than
Scott Frost
already."**

***Dean Blevins
ABC sideline reporter***





Eric Crouch was sitting on the back of a sofa near the door in the South Stadium varsity lounge, listening to coach Frank Solich answer reporters' questions at Nebraska's weekly news conference on the Tuesday before the Kansas State game. Bobby Newcombe, who was standing to Crouch's left, reached around from behind and tapped Crouch's right shoulder, then quickly pulled his arm back.

Crouch instinctively turned to his right before realizing the tap had come from Newcombe.

If there's any personal animosity between the Cornhusker quarterbacks, it's well-hidden.

Crouch and Newcombe became friends when they arrived as freshmen a year ago. And they seem to have remained friends, despite the fact that they have competed with each other and will resume competing when Newcombe recovers from the knee injury that has sidelined him for most of this season.

Newcombe is optimistic that he might be able to return for the Holiday Bowl game.

"Hopefully," Newcombe told ABC sideline reporter Dean Blevins during the telecast of the Colorado game. "The doctors said I'll start running a week from Monday (Nov. 30). All the swelling has gone out of it, and my leg has definitely gotten a lot stronger than it was a couple of weeks ago."

Whether or not Solich would be inclined to use Newcombe in the bowl game if he were to get clearance from doctors is uncertain. But it's only a matter of time before he returns to action. And then the Cornhuskers will have a quarterback controversy unlike any in recent memory.

It's somewhat unusual to have two players competing for a starting job at the same position to be good friends. But it appears Eric Crouch and Bobby Newcombe qualify on both counts

Buddy SYSTEM

"Bobby and Eric may be as complete of players as we've had in the system in terms of speed, in terms of gaining knowledge as quickly as they have gained it, in terms of having the ability to be great throwers," Solich said late in the season. "So we'll see how it all plays out for the two of them."

"But they could be as talented of guys as we've had in the system."

At the same time, anyway. Nebraska has had extremely talented quarterbacks recently, including Tommie Frazier and Scott Frost, to whom ABC's Blevins compared Crouch. "Eric Crouch is a potential superstar," he said. "The Colorado coaches tell us he's better than Scott Frost already."

That they were preparing for this season's game influenced their assessment, of course. Frost was the 10th player in major college history to rush and pass for 1,000 or more yards in leading Nebraska to the coaches' national championship last season. Crouch isn't in that category just yet.

But the redshirt freshman from Omaha (Millard North) High School has similar skills. "I think Eric is a complete player," Solich said in answer to a question before the Colorado game.

Solich was asked by a reporter from a Boulder, Colo., newspaper if Crouch reminded him of any other Nebraska quarterback. "Bobby (Newcombe)," Solich replied, eliciting laughter.

"I think Eric and Bobby are similar in a lot of ways," he explained. "They both are tremendous students of football, and in a very short period of time, they have really gained a great deal of knowledge of our offense and then have translated that knowledge onto the football field."

"We've been really pleased with both of them along those lines, and I think they both give you the kind of skill you're looking for at that position. They've got great speed, great quickness."

"They have excellent throwing arms. They can hurt you on the option with the big play. They can hurt you with the big play on the pass. And they can hurt you with the big play when the pass breaks down and they have to scramble. So I think both of them bring similar things to the table."

Crouch has played in eight games,

"Bobby and Eric could be as talented of guys as we've had in the system."



including five as the starter, completing 49 of 101 passes (48.5 percent) for 601 yards and four touchdowns with four interceptions. He is the team's second-leading rusher behind Correll Buckhalter, with 459 yards and five touchdowns on 96 carries.

Personal statistics haven't been his concern, however.

"I haven't taken a look at any of that stuff yet," Crouch said after the Colorado game. "I really don't have any intentions of looking at that stuff."

"I know it wasn't a huge day for me (statistically) but I never look at it as 'what did I do?' or 'how many yards did I have?' As long as we come out with a victory, I'm pretty happy for the team."

"Any time the team wins, I feel pretty good."

Crouch finished spring practice as the No. 2 quarterback, of course, and it appeared he

would spend the season seeing limited action. After Newcombe suffered a torn posterior cruciate ligament, however, Crouch found himself starting against Alabama-Birmingham and California.

Then he suffered a hip pointer and was replaced by Newcombe. When

Newcombe played in six games, all as a starter, rushing for 228 yards and eight touchdowns and completing 50 of 79 passes for 712 yards and one score.

Newcombe's knee injury didn't heal properly, and after senior walk-on Monte Christo got a start, Crouch returned.

Dealing with adversity, and uncertainty, has "helped me out in becoming a leader for this team," said Crouch. "I've really been put in some situations this year that have forced me into that role."

Newcombe has played in six games, all as a starter, rushing for 228 yards and eight touchdowns and completing 50 of 79 passes (63.3 percent) for 712 yards and one touchdown.

The frustration of the knee injury caused him to go home to Albuquerque, N.M., the week of the Iowa State game to get additional opinions from doctors regarding the injury.

The trip home, coupled with comments attributed to him in an Albuquerque newspaper story, created the impression he might be considering a transfer. He discounted that when he returned.

"Is there any truth to that? No, I don't plan on transferring," said

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Newcombe. "I like where I'm at right now. I like Nebraska, the coaches, the players and everybody around me."

His quote in the newspaper story that "nothing's impossible" was based on a "deeper question than just the transfer," he said. "When I answered that question, I was thinking of the fact that you really never know what's going to happen to yourself, on the field or off the field, to make decisions long-term."

"Right now, I like where I'm at, and I plan on staying at Nebraska."

The newspaper story included quotes from Newcombe regarding uncomplimentary letters he had received from Cornhusker fans. He confirmed he had received such letters, but not many.

"Maybe a few," he said. "It wasn't a situation where I was getting something from thousands of people. It wasn't something that was bothering me a whole lot. I thought it was interesting somebody would waste that much time to actually give me negative feedback, that I really wouldn't care about."

"It's not something that was bother-

The Crouch/Newcombe situation will be similar to the one in 1995 when Tommie Frazier and the late Brook Berringer competed in the spring and during the preseason for the starting job.

ing me a whole lot."

He didn't bring up the subject. "Somebody asked me a question about it, and I answered it truthfully," he said. That's how he deals with things like "when somebody asks me a question such as 'did you get bad mail?' or 'is there anybody on the team that treats you like you were in high school?'"

The newspaper story also indicated that there were personality conflicts between him and some of his Nebraska teammates, though "actually, I didn't say

conflicts," said Newcombe.

"It's the same thing in every program, especially when you have 180 players. You're probably going to have two or three, or one or two, that probably don't agree with everything you do. That's another situation. It's not a really big deal; it's not something that really bothered me a lot, either."

"The truth of the matter is, (in) any program, you're going to have . . . (in) any situation, any company you work for . . . you guys probably have people who don't agree with you all the time."

Whether or not all of his teammates like him isn't really the issue, anyway.

"I'd say more 'respected,' maybe looked up to," he said. "And that's something you earn through dealing

with adversity, how you endure certain negative situations or just problems that occur."

Respect also is earned "through your play," according to Newcombe. "If you play well when you're not injured, and if you try to play the best you can while you're injured, you gain respect. Whether you're liked or not, I don't think that has much relevance to how the team performs," he said.

Newcombe, like Crouch, has had to endure his share of adversity this season. And like Crouch, the adversity has "definitely made me a stronger person," said Newcombe.

"I learned in my communications class that anything that comes out of your mouth, you can't take back, and I can't really guard against anything I'm saying or I have said or I will say. But one thing I can say is, I won't lie to you guys (reporters). If you ask me a question, I'll give you an answer."

"At the same time, you do have to make sure you word it correctly."

After returning from Albuquerque, Newcombe continued to provide encouragement and emotional support for Crouch and Christo. He made the trip to Kansas State and was on the sideline in street clothes during both that game and the Colorado game, before which he was throwing passes.

Crouch's play produced speculation that the Cornhuskers might be best served by Newcombe's returning to wingback next season, enabling both to be on the field at the same time.

Newcombe was outstanding at wingback by the end of the 1997 season and didn't dismiss the possibility of switching back. "During spring ball last year, in the middle of it I guess, I went to Coach and said any position on the field I can play I'll play if it helps this team win," he said. "My goal is to help this team be successful at any cost, really, whether it's me playing quarterback or receiver or not."

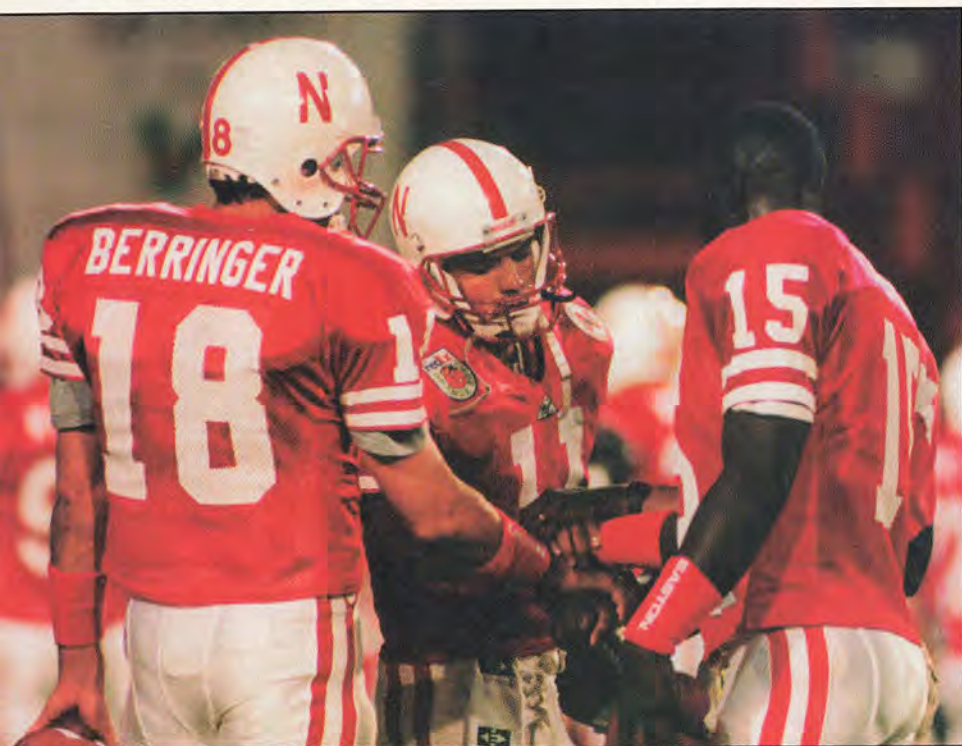
"I want this team to be successful."

Crouch's attitude is the same.

"I'm definitely in this as a team thing," he said after the Kansas State game.

The prospect of having Crouch and Newcombe on the field at the same time is offset by the reality that sophomore walk-on Jay Runty is the only quarterback returning next season.

"I think it's somewhat unusual to have two players in the program who are able to (play quarterback) at the level these guys are able to do it at such an early age," Solich said. ■





SMOKIN' JOE

With a little bit of playing time on offense, Joe Walker could have a decent shot at becoming the Huskers' next Heisman Trophy winner • by Steve Roe

While Deion Sanders is having an outstanding season in Dallas and Charles Woodson is beginning his post-Heisman career in Oakland, another jack of all trades is emerging from the same mold. Joe Walker, the Cornhuskers' strong safety/kick returner extraordinaire, could one day be listed among college football's best all-around athletes.

With a little bit of exposure on the offensive side of the ball, the Huskers could have their first Heisman Trophy winner since Mike Rozier won it in 1983 by rushing for 2,148 yards.

Another Husker Heisman winner, Johnny Rodgers, had more in common with Joe Walker. In Rodgers' 1972 Heisman campaign he averaged 15.8 yards per punt return and 23.0 yards on kickoffs. Rodgers, however, had the benefit of more tangible rushing and receiving statistics, whereas Walker is limited to defense. His statistical categories include pass breakups, interceptions and tackles, which don't garner as much media attention.

"I'd love to play offense. It's my

dream to play offense and defense," Walker said. "I've been playing offense and defense since youth leagues."

Walker finished his sophomore season with an average of 11.3 yards on 25 punt returns, including a 73-yard return for a touchdown against Oklahoma. He also ran back 17 kickoffs at 21.5 yards per return with a 99-yard score against the Louisiana Tech Bulldogs. When Walker returned an interception 65 yards for a touchdown against Iowa State, he accomplished a rare feat: He became only the fifth player in NCAA history to return a punt, a kickoff and an interception for a touchdown in the same season.

While Walker certainly has the ability and desire to step in on offense once in a while, the coaches are not quite as thrilled at the idea.

Defensive backs coach George Darlington is content to keep Walker on defense and special teams. "We have a number of players who could play on both sides of the ball, Joe being one of them. It would make him ineffective because of everything he

would have to learn."

Walker may one day get his chance to showcase his skills on the offensive side of the ball, but right now he is concentrating on his defensive responsibilities. He does not lack confidence in his capability to play receiver if he were needed.

"I'm just a player. The coaches make those decisions. If they want to take advantage of my abilities, then I'll play there," he said.

Coach Darlington is aware of Walker's athleticism and natural talents on the field. He said that even though Walker may not play on both sides of the ball, he does play several positions on defense. Before moving to rover, he played cornerback and nickel back while the Huskers worked through injuries to Clint Finley and Khari Reynolds. Coach Darlington also said that Walker would be more likely to play running back rather than wingback if a situation arose where he was needed on offense.

Joe Walker's athletic talents will be confined to defense and special teams. At least, for now. ■

Committee Chairman

Danny Nee isn't about to describe Joe Holmes as the next Tyronn Lue. Quite the contrary.

"You're comparing him to Tyronn Lue," Nee said in response to a writer's question during a news conference prior to the start of his 13th season as head coach at Nebraska.

"He's not Tyronn Lue. He doesn't want to be Tyronn Lue. And most of all, he can't be Tyronn Lue because Tyronn Lue is playing for the Lakers. Joe is fitting a slot I've created, a mentality I've created of what I want one of my point guards to be. And he's doing it superbly."

Nee's assessment was based on Holmes' play during preseason practice and two exhibition games in which he didn't commit a turnover. "He plays steady defense," said Nee.

"He's an intelligent man who listens. He's always asking me, 'How am I doing? How do you want it done?' I really think with this team that's the kind of point guard I want."

Nee expects Holmes to play solid defense, handle the ball and distribute it to his teammates. He had eight assists in a 95-84 victory against Washington State in Fairbanks, Alaska.

He had only two points, but scoring isn't his primary concern, according to Nee, who is using multiple point guards this season. Nebraska has a point guard "by committee," he said.

Each player brings different strengths to the position.

"Another slot is (filled by) Cookie Belcher," Nee said. "When I put Cookie there, I want a different type of

Danny Nee's three-guard rotation is keyed by JUCO dishman Joe Holmes

play from that position. So Joe's going to give me at least 20 minutes of control, 20 minutes of steady-type play, quarterback-type play.

"And Cookie can give us the diversification we want."

Belcher is bigger and stronger, and a scoring threat. He's a "go-to guy," Nee said.

A third member of Nebraska's point guard "committee" is redshirt freshman Cary Cochran, "who can give us another type of player," according to Nee. "In situations, there's going to be an extra outside shooter on the floor in Cary Cochran, who can hit the open shot."

Cochran set the Iowa high school career scoring record, playing for his father, Carl, at Neola Tri-Center. He scored 2,650 points in 93 games, scoring in double figures in all but one of those games and averaging 33 points per game as a senior. He scored 40 or more points 11 times.

Cochran's self-admitted weakness is defense. "They didn't recruit me because I'm an unbelievable one-on-one defensive player," he told the *Omaha World-Herald*

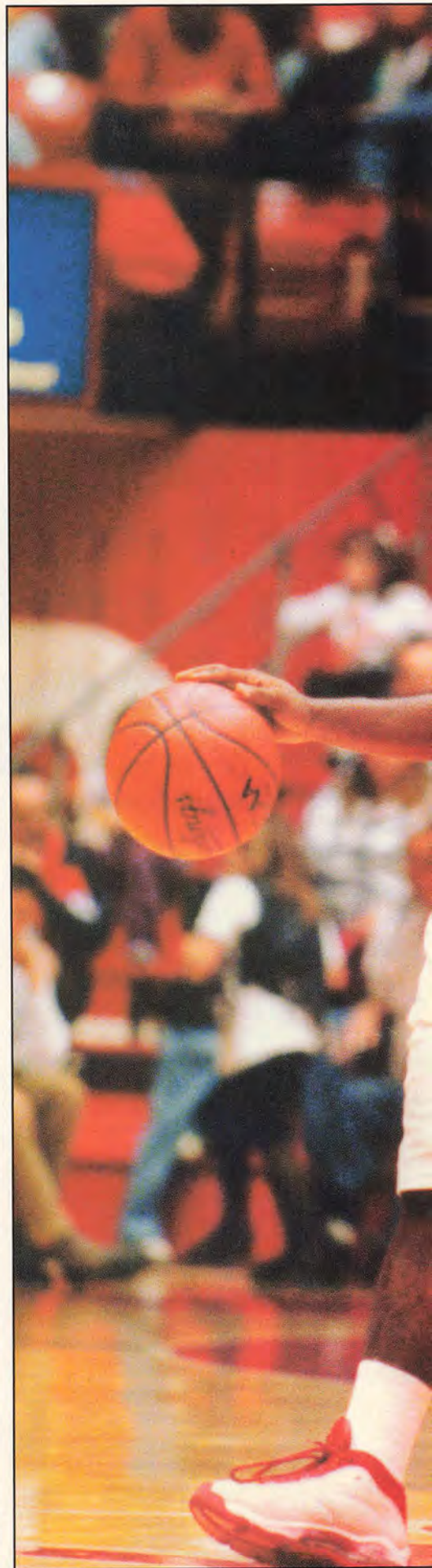
recently. "The reason I'm here is to try to score."

Cochran provides a three-point threat at the expense of defense, which dictates to some extent who is at the point.

"We have Joe to guard the quick guard," said Nee. "We have Cookie to play the situation, to stabilize us and play a more balanced attack. And we



Cookie BELCHER





have the scorer in Cochran."

Having multiple point guards should enable Nebraska to control the tempo of the game, according to Nee.

"A lot of times when Cookie's in the game we're trying to develop Chad (Johnson) and Troy (Piatkowski) into bringing the ball up the floor, just playing without a point guard.

"We've done that before," Nee said. "We did it last year with Lue out of the game. We've done it in years past. It's not something new. But I think the last three years with Tyrone being the focal point, he's been on the floor so much that we've developed a taste for a certain type of point guard.

"Now we're moving to another role for our point guard."

Early in the season, Holmes established himself as the chairman of Nee's point guard committee, which is the reason he was recruited from Tyler (Texas) Junior College.

Holmes is an excellent passer with a knack for finding the open man, according to senior forward Andy Markowski. And he's comfortable with his role as a facilitator rather than a scorer.

Holmes played at Duval High in Seat Pleasant, Md., a Baltimore suburb, averaging 19 points, eight assists

and three rebounds for a 3A state championship team as a senior.

He didn't receive any major college scholarship offers, however, and went to Tyler based on a tryout set up with the help of a summer-league coach. He was a captain last season, averaging 10.4 points, 8.1 assists and three rebounds for a 15-17 team.

Despite the record, all five Tyler starters earned major college scholarships this past year.

Holmes' teammate at Tyler, Rodney Fields, also came to Nebraska. Fields, who signed a letter-of-intent with the Cornhuskers out of high school, is sitting out this season as a medical red-shirt.

Nee offered Holmes a scholarship after Lamont Perry, another junior col-

lege transfer whom the Cornhuskers were interested in, ended up signing with Fairleigh Dickinson.

Holmes picked Nebraska over South Alabama and Norfolk (Va.) State. He's not going to be mistaken for Lue, an All-Big 12 honoree last season as well as a first-round NBA draft pick.

He does, however, give the Cornhuskers versatility and options at point guard.

"There are things we're going to do with different people in the game," Nee said. "And I like it." ■

"He's not Tyrone Lue. Joe (Holmes) is fitting a slot I've created, a mentality I've created of what I want one of my point guards to be. And he's doing it superbly."

The Letter Is In The Mail

Three players signed letters-of-intent in mid-November: 6-11, 205-pound **Brian Conklin** from Hubbard, Ohio; 6-9, 220-pound **Kenny Booker** from Mt. Zion Christian Academy in Durham, N.C., and 6-6 1/2, 240-pound **Steffon Bradford** from Compton (Calif.) Community College.

Conklin, who made an oral commitment to Nebraska in September, picked the Cornhuskers over West Virginia, Northwestern, Bowling Green, Cleveland State and Marshall.

"Bradford, some people think, may be the No. 1 junior college player in the country in California," **Danny Nee** said. "If he's not, I'll just tell you, he's very, very good. He's a cross between an **Adrian Dantley** and a **Charles Barkley**, very physical on the blocks, can hit the 15-foot jump shot, very mature."

The native of Clewiston, Fla., led Compton to the California junior college championship last season, averaging 27 points. He chose Nebraska over Missouri and Nevada-Las Vegas.

Booker, a native of Clarkson, Miss., averaged 15 points, eight rebounds and two blocked shots as a junior at Mt. Zion, where first-year Cornhusker assistant **Cleo Hill** was an assistant.

Booker is "very athletic, raw, a little bit like a **Carl Hayes** from a few years ago, a thin body but getting bigger every day," Nee said. "We needed help in the front-court, and we got it."

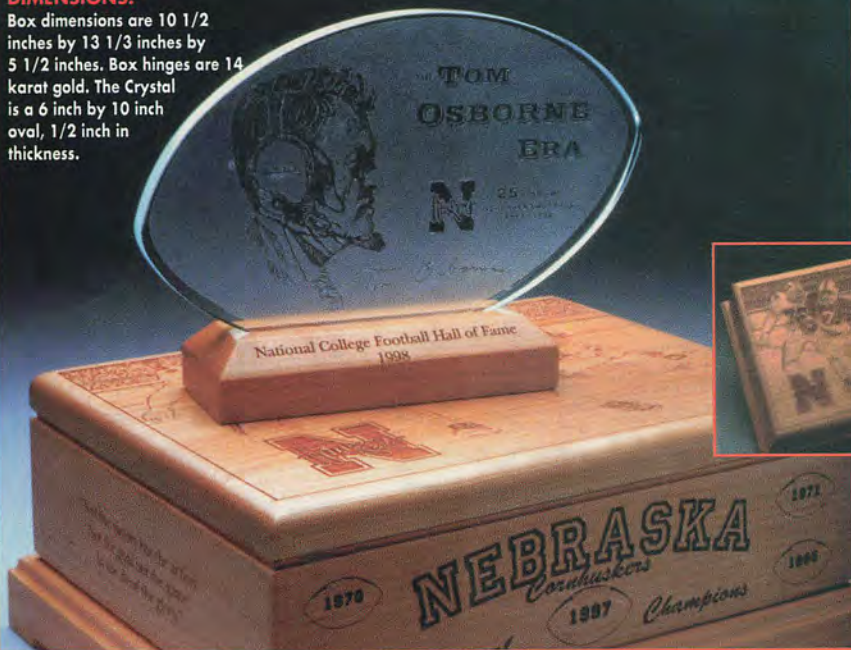
Nebraska's scholarships for next season have been filled, assuming **Troy Piatkowski** and **Larry Florence** both regain a season of eligibility under stipulations in the NCAA's Proposition 16.

Piatkowski and Florence are currently listed as seniors. ■

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RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

NORTHERN LIGHT

Senior Venson Hamilton was named to the all-tournament team at the Ford Credit Top of the World Classic in Fairbanks, Alaska, in November. That was one of the few bright spots as the Cornhuskers lost two of three games, including a 78-41 blowout to Wisconsin in the fifth-place game.

"We probably got beat as bad as we've ever been beaten," Danny Nee said.

Even so, the early-season trip north was useful.

"We felt that up in Alaska, the things we experienced, the things that were exposed, our weaknesses, we're working on," he said.

The Cornhuskers committed 66 turnovers in the three games.

"I'm very concerned about it," said Nee of his team's problem protecting the ball. "We're real concerned. It's an area that we think part of it's mental and part of it's decision-making. Some of the players, and our better players, have turned it over at a very high level.

"We were concerned about it before we went to Alaska, and it got exposed in Alaska."

That was a value of playing in the tournament. "I'll tell you the truth, it's better to get concerned in November than in the middle of February, so we have no illusions of where we are," Nee said.

COVER THE CHILDREN'S EYES

Nebraska made only one of 10 shots from three-point range against a hot-shooting Wisconsin team that led 42-15 at halftime. The Cornhuskers might have cut into that deficit rather than falling further behind during the second half had Nee not substituted liberally after the intermission.

"It really was partly my control because of the units I put on the floor," he said.

Andy Markowski, for example, came out of the game with a slightly dislocated finger and didn't play rest of the game.

"In a big game, I would have played him," Nee said. "So that gave some rookies a chance to play.

The game was probably a 20-point game most of the way in the second half.

"Then I put basically another unit on the floor and it got ugly quick. But I wanted them to feel part of it. I didn't want them riding home on the plane thinking it would have been different if they had played. I know how that goes. So we had them all get a good 10 minutes.

"They had a chance to be in the toilet with all of us."

DIVIDED LOYALTY

The Cornhuskers opened with a 79-59 victory against North Carolina-Greensboro at the Devaney Sports Center before an audience of only 4,946, the smallest crowd for a regular-season game in Nee's 13 seasons as coach. The small crowd was hardly a surprise, however. The Nebraska football team played at Kansas State that afternoon, prompting the basketball game's tipoff to be moved to 11:30 a.m.

The Kansas State-Nebraska football game was televised, beginning at 2:30 p.m.

"It is the best time? No. It's not the best time," Nee said beforehand.

"But at the University of Nebraska we're a team. We work together. I wouldn't care if we were playing the game at 9 o'clock in the morning or 12 o'clock at night. It's our first game of the season. I'm a basketball coach. I want to coach basketball. My kids are players. They want to play.

"If there's 10,000 here, it would be great. If there's 5,000 here, it's OK."

JOHNSON "A PLEASANT SURPRISE"

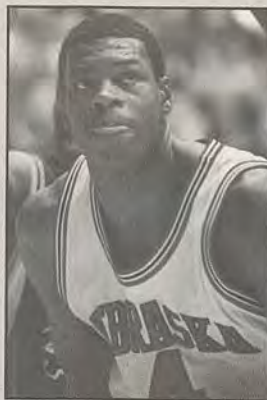
What a difference a year makes. Nee calls Chad Johnson "the most improved player on our team from a year ago." The 6-foot-6, 215-pound sophomore from Monticello, Fla., has "been really a pleasant surprise," Nee said prior to an opening-game victory against North Carolina-Greensboro.

Johnson celebrated his 19th birthday on Dec. 15.

"He's young chronologically," said Nee. "But I think he has really large goals, big goals, and he sees the opportunity.

"Just his whole approach (has changed). He knows what's expected of him, and he's just carrying out the job. I think he's going to be a big-time player."

Johnson's father, Clemon, played 10 seasons in the NBA. ■



Venson Hamilton provided one of the few bright spots on an otherwise forgettable Alaskan tournament.

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Talent And Timing

Terry Pettit is hoping his team's athleticism and leadership will bring a second national title to Lincoln
By Todd Henrichs

Since the very first NCAA Tournament in 1981, no national women's volleyball champion has finished with an unbeaten record.

So did Nebraska coach Terry Pettit breathe a sigh of relief when the Huskers lost their only regular-season match last month at Texas A&M? No. Superstitions apparently aren't high on his list.

"I don't throw salt over my shoulder or cross my fingers or avoid ladders," Pettit said prior to his team's 17th appearance in 18 NCAA Tournaments. "The best teams win, and that's why we are working hard to be the best team. You've got to play great volleyball."

Superstitions aside, there are plenty of factors pointing in NU's favor this postseason. First, third-ranked Nebraska already has their one loss, just as the 1995 team had en route to the school's first national title. That championship team had three seniors

— setter Christy Johnson, outside hitter Billie Winsett and middle blocker Allison Weston — who coincidentally played the same three positions as the members of this year's senior class.

But Pettit said the biggest similarity between the two teams is that both were good when it counted. And entering NCAA play, the 1998 Huskers may be playing their best volleyball of the season.

"I don't know if we're playing our best, but I think we're on our way to playing our best," Nebraska senior setter Fiona Nepo said. "Some might see that (loss) as a blemish, but I think that made us a better team."

"A lot of people out there probably think Nebraska is a good team, but they're not good enough to take the whole thing. That just keeps driving us."

After the 8-15, 15-12, 8-15, 15-6, 16-14 loss at Texas A&M, the Huskers stormed back to sweep nationally ranked conference rivals Texas, Colorado and Kansas State on the

Behind All-Big 12 selections, Korver, Meendering and Nepo (right), the Huskers appear to have all the ingredients for a title run.



Scott Bruhn





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road. At 28-1, they earned the No. 1 seed in the Pacific Region and the chance to play four matches at home on the road to the Final Four in Madison, Wis.

Nepo, a native of Honolulu who owns Nebraska's all-time record for set assists, said gaining that home court edge was huge for the Huskers. A three-time all-conference pick, Nepo was named Big 12 Conference Player of the Year following the regular season and is considered a strong candidate for national honors.

Pettit, who has led five NU teams to Final Four appearances, was voted the

league's Coach of the Year after Nebraska finished 19-1 in Big 12 play, a match ahead of Texas.

The road to the Final Four is never easy, however. This year the field was expanded to 64 teams, meaning the champion must win six straight matches to take home the trophy.

Nebraska, which defeated Morgan State and Utah in its first two tournament matches, had to win only five tournament matches in its 1995 title run.

"There are 250 teams that don't get in the tournament, so now you're playing good volleyball teams in the first and second rounds," Pettit said. "In the regional finals, you're playing great volleyball teams. And in the Final Four, you're playing great volleyball teams who happen to be play-

ing their best volleyball right then."

Nebraska's talent level is daunting with Nepo, senior middle blocker Megan Korver and sophomore outside hitter Nancy Meendering all earning spots on the All-Big 12 first team. Those three players are also candidates for All-American honors. Before the tournament, Korver was close to surpassing the 1,000 mark for career kills at Nebraska.

The Huskers have also gotten strong play from senior outside hitter Jaime Krondak, an honorable mention All-Big 12 pick, and junior middle blocker Tonia Tauke. Junior Mandy Monson, bothered for part of the season by tendinitis, started Nebraska's final three matches of the regular season and began to flash her old form.

Throw in a deep bench and the desire to win and all the ingredients are in place for a title run. Kansas State was swept twice by Nebraska, but coach Jim McLaughlin saw enough to declare NU as his favorite to win the national title.

McLaughlin, who won a NCAA championship while coaching men's volleyball in California, knows something about what it takes.

"I just think they have all the things you need to win," said McLaughlin, whose Wildcats were one of six Big 12 teams to earn NCAA bids. "They score points well, they can be a presence at the net, they've got a great setter and offensively they can attack different parts of the net.

"They can make things happen."

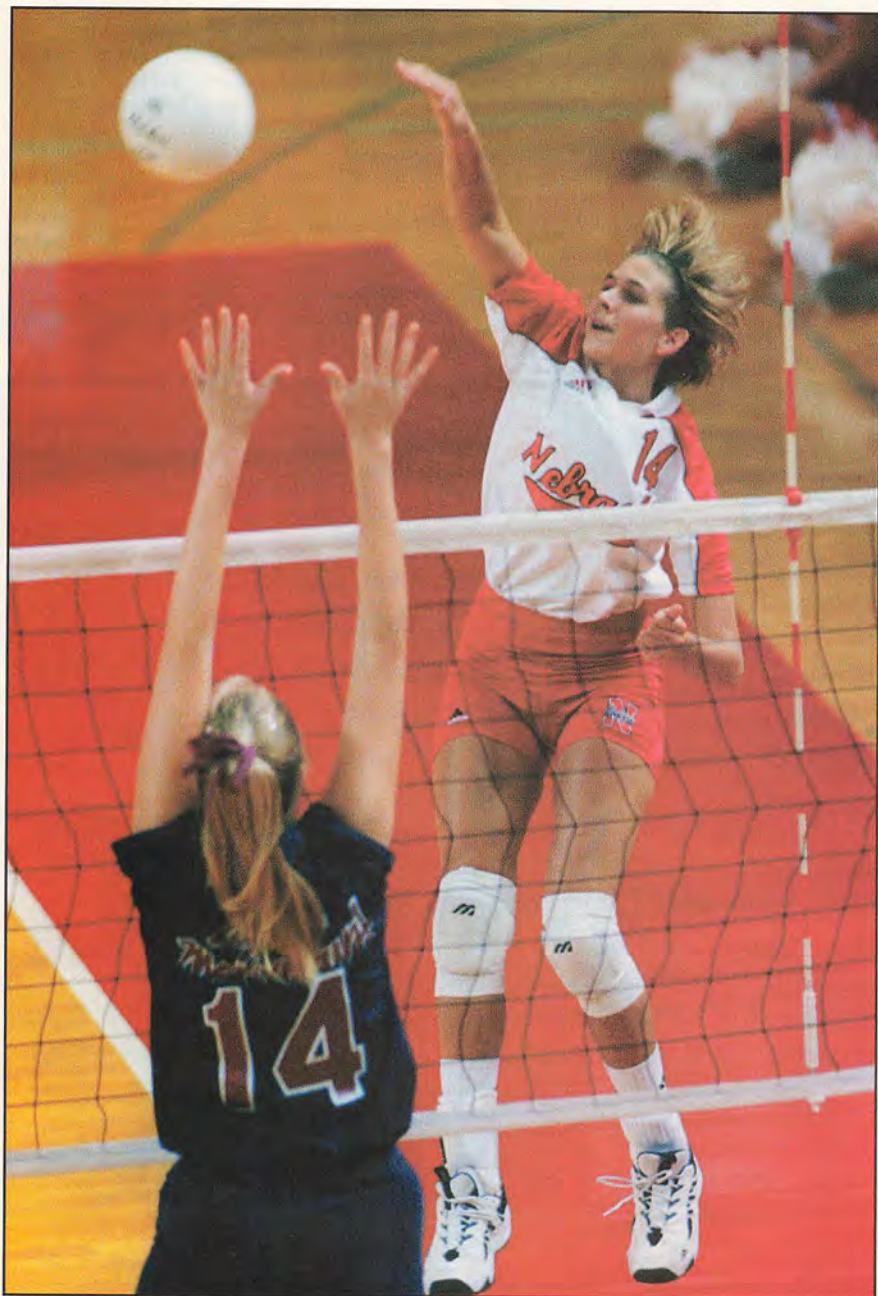
After the regular season, Nebraska led the nation in blocking and was fifth in hitting percentage. The Huskers weren't wearing down opponents, but instead wearing them out with physical, dominating play. Of Nebraska's 28 victories, all but four were three-game sweeps. At home at the NU Coliseum, Nebraska is unbeaten in 61 matches.

The tournament, however, is a whole new season, and Pettit said he is as excited as anyone. He said 25 years on the bench haven't taken anything away from the excitement of post-season play.

"I think I'm like the players," Pettit said. "This time of year, our noses flair a little bit.

"There are a lot of reasons players come to Nebraska, but maybe this may be the most important reason. We have great talent and we have a chance to compete at the highest level." ■

Senior Jaime Krondak doesn't usually put up huge numbers, but she has been one of the Big 12's most consistent players this season.



Travel Weary

An early-season trip to Hawaii was no picnic for the Nebraska women's basketball team. In fact, a loss to UCLA and a heart-pounding win over Louisville showed the Huskers they have a long way to go to reach where they want to be this season.

"We had our moments of good basketball," said point guard **Nicole Kubik**, who led Nebraska to a 2-1 record in the Rainbow Wahine Classic. "We also had moments where we played horribly, moments where we could have been beaten by any team in the world."

Nebraska, ranked 23rd by the Associated Press, finished fifth in the eight-team tournament, losing 85-67 to No. 10-ranked UCLA before beating St. John's 85-66 and

Louisville 62-61.

The Huskers, 5-1, faced two more road tests before returning home in December. The Huskers opened the season with three straight home victories, including a 72-48 demolition of then-No. 21 Arizona.

Things weren't so rosy on the road. Nebraska was never in the game with UCLA after halftime. Against Louisville, NU led by 11 points with under 10 minutes remaining but needed two **Brooke Schwartz** free throws with :04 seconds left to hang on.

Like Nebraska, Louisville and UCLA advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament a year ago. The Cardinals and Bruins each returned four starters.

"I'm happy to survive," NU coach Paul Sanderford said after his team's win over Louisville. "I think it was an NCAA Tournament-type win. Had we lost, it would have felt miserable."

Kubik continued to lead NU in scoring, averaging

18.3 points and 7.6 assists in the tournament games. The junior guard from Cambridge led NU with 23 points in wins over South Alabama and Arizona to open the season.

Nebraska, which also beat Wisconsin-Milwaukee in November, was outrebounded twice in Hawaii, a statistic that haunts Sanderford. The Huskers also averaged 23 turnovers, raising their season average to 20.3 per game.

KICKING THEMSELVES

Close isn't good enough for **John Walker**, but after a 2-1 loss at Notre Dame, the Huskers appear closer to where the Nebraska women's soccer coach thinks they should be.

The 13th-ranked Huskers ended 17-4-1, losing at No. 4 Notre Dame for the second straight year in the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA Tournament. A year ago, however, the Irish handed Nebraska its worst loss ever, a 6-0 pounding that sent Walker looking for answers

in the offseason.

"I think they are still better than us, but now the margin is just much smaller," Walker said. "We're still such a young program, and this is the sort of thing that just gives the players more experience."

Nebraska returns 12 of the 15 who played against the Irish and hope to have a healthy **Jenny Benson** back at full speed by fall.

The return of Benson, possibly Nebraska's best all-around player, should help offset the loss of senior **Kim Engesser**. The Big 12's Player of the Year is NU's all-time leader in goals and points.

The Huskers also return first-team all-conference defenders **Isabelle Morneau** and **Sharolta Nonen**, midfielder **Amy Walsh** and forward **Lindsay Eddleman**.

"The potential for next year is tremendous," Walker said, "but we'd like to get over the hump. Our goal here is to win the national championship, so anything less than that is disappointing." ■

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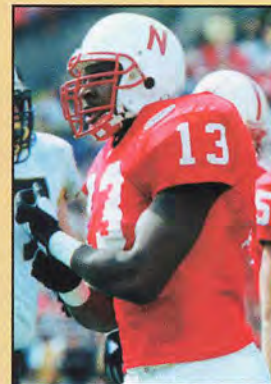
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As Seen Through The Eyes Of Carlos Polk



**Carlos
POLK**

YOU MEET NEBRASKA middle linebacker Carlos Polk and it is easy to forget he is only 21 years old, only a sophomore.

He seems a decade or so older.

"I hear that every day, with my walk and all," the Rockford, Ill., native said.

Polk lumbers around like an older man, his plodding bow-legged gait making him easily distinguishable in a pack of teammates 100 yards away.

Then there's the voice — deep and booming and a little scratchy. You get the feeling Polk never endured puberty, that he probably skipped childhood and just started cracking ballcarriers with vicious hits on football Saturdays.

Yet Polk said last season he was making "freshman mistakes" at his position. Such errors are unacceptable at middle linebacker, the defense's equivalent of the quarterback.

"I was a little hesitant, worried whether I'd make the right call," Polk said. "But this year, it's almost second nature."

Polk backs up senior Jay Foreman, a three-year starter. Come spring, the starting job will be Polk's. But the 6-foot-3, 245-pound Polk hesitates to look that far into the future. Remember, there's a bowl game for Polk and his mates to think about.

"We're looking forward to next year, but we know we have to finish off this year on a good note," Polk said.

Polk speaks reverently of the seniors and is mindful of the pain they've endured in a 9-3 regular season in which national-title aspirations vanished long ago.

"After the losses, everybody was looking to them like, 'What are we going to do now?'," Polk said. "Sheldon (Jackson) and (Chad) Kelsay and (Mike) Ruck(er) and (Josh) Heskew — all of them — wouldn't give up. Come Monday, we were always thinking about the next game. Losing a game at Nebraska, that's a big thing. But they would snap right back. That had a big effect on all of us."

When Polk first arrived at Nebraska, Foreman helped him learn to call the defense's schemes. Or to simply make the correct first step on a play, a tidbit that could be the difference between making a sack and allowing a big play.

"Jay's helped me calm down," Polk said. "I used to go out there all tensed up. Jay told me, 'Just calm down. Act like it's high school, just go play.'"

This season Polk's best game might have been at Iowa State, where he made four tackles, two behind the line.

"That was my type of game, cold and snowy," he said. "It reminded me of home."

Last December, Polk was walking on the beach in Miami, where Nebraska beat Tennessee in the Orange Bowl. Some friends from Rockford spotted him from behind. From far behind.

"They noticed my walk, my trademark," he said. "I'm proud of it. It distinguishes me from anyone." ■ — *As told to Steve Sipple*

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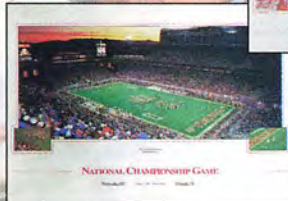


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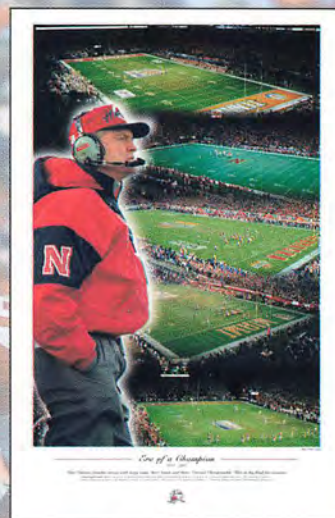


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Big 12 Recruiting Update

RUMORS

I am not going out on a limb by saying that Mack Brown is having as good a year in recruiting as he did on the field. The Longhorns added another huge commitment when cornerback **Kendrick Turner** (5-foot-10, 165 pounds, with 4.3 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Dallas (Kimball) picked the Longhorns over Texas A&M, UCLA, Houston and Florida State.

Nebraska currently has 12 commitments, and once again, the Cornhuskers are putting together a stellar class. Six prep All-Americans are listed among that group.

Oklahoma State is getting a number of players from the JUCO ranks who originally committed to OSU a couple of years ago. The Cowboys have 10 commitments, with tight end **Bryan Blackwood** (6-5, 250, 4.7) of Northeastern A&M (Okla.) JC headlining the group. Blackwood is rated as one of the top junior college tight ends in the country. The Pokes also picked up a commitment from defensive tackle **Aaron McConnell** (6-3 1/2, 260, 4.9) of Midwest City, Okla., who originally committed to Colorado.

Missouri hopes to cash in on a second successful year on the field. The Tigers have seven commitments, the latest coming from linebackers **David Monroe** (6-0, 235, 4.7) of Hutchinson (Kan.) JC and **Eric Eatherly** (6-1, 225, 4.65) of Kemper Military (Mo.) JC.

Colorado is up to five commitments with All-American defensive tackle **Jon Hawk** (6-6, 270, 5.0) of Denver (Bishop Mullen) picking the Buffaloes over the Sooners.

Baylor has four commitments, led by junior college All-American defensive end **Juqua Thomas** (6-3, 240, 4.7) of Northeastern A&M (Okla.) JC.

Iowa State has earned a commitment from another Davis brother. **Josh Davis** (5-7, 180, 4.4) of Miami (Southridge) is regarded as one of the top players in Florida and heads a group of three ISU commitments.

Kansas has two and Kansas State only one at this point, but for the Wildcats, **Anthony "Fred" Johnson** (6-3, 185, 4.45) of Tulsa (Washington), Okla., is an All-American wide receiver.

Texas A&M has two verbal commitments but is getting ready to host around 35 athletes in the month of December. Texas Tech has two with running back **Dominic Rhodes** (5-10, 180, 4.4) of Tyler (Texas) JC the headliner of the group.

Finally, Oklahoma has lost its two commitments due to the coaching change from John Blake to Bob Stoops. It will be interesting to see if Stoops can rally in recruiting with such a late start. ■

Nebraska Carries Clout With Class Of '99

Despite being shut out of the Big 12 title game, Nebraska has proven it can still recruit as well as any team in the country

By James HALE

Nebraska headed into the crucial month of December well ahead of the recruiting game. Twelve commitments are solidly on the board. As usual, the Cornhuskers have cleaned up in-state, and once again Nebraska is one of the key programs that every school in the country is talking about.

No, Nebraska isn't playing in the Big 12 title game this season, but the Cornhuskers are still bowling and are still one of the most attractive teams to top 100 recruits in the country. The Cornhuskers have put together an outstanding class, but quarterbacks and running backs remain a priority, along with defensive linemen and linebackers.

The Cornhuskers earned two more verbal commitments as November came to a close. Offensive lineman **Tim Green** (6-foot-5, 300 pounds, with 5.25 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Omaha (Westside), Neb., earned a passing grade on his college entrance exam in early November and earned a scholarship offer from the Cornhuskers. Tim will join his brother, Mike, who will be a redshirt sophomore on the squad next season.

"There has never been any doubt where I was going to school," said Green. "I grew up always wanting to play at Nebraska. In fact, I think every kid in Nebraska grows up wanting to

play for Nebraska. The tradition at Nebraska is outstanding, especially in their offensive line. It's a great honor for an offensive lineman to be recruited to Nebraska because you know they only recruit the very best to represent them up front.

"The fact they have offered me a scholarship means so much to me. I will get a chance to play with my brother, and that is something I have always looked forward to, and I get to play for the program that I have always admired and rooted for."

Green had a fantastic 1998 season. Playing on both sides of the ball at offensive and defensive tackle, Green finished the season with 55 assisted tackles and 22 solo stops. He also had eight quarterback sacks and averaged over 10 pancake blocks a game.

Also committing to the Cornhuskers recently was outside linebacker **Robin Miller** (6-0, 215, 4.6) of Kent, Wash. Miller visited on Oct. 31 along with offensive lineman **Shane Lehman** and left

telling the Cornhuskers that he would sign in February.

"Nebraska was everything that I expected it to be and more," said Miller. "The atmosphere at a Nebraska football game is incredible. You can tell that football is king. I love how Nebraska is always attacking on defense and the role of their outside



Quarterback Chris Massey had an official visit to Nebraska scheduled for Dec. 17. Massey is taking his other official visits to Notre Dame, Michigan, Miami and Kansas State.



After committing to Nebraska, offensive lineman Tim Green called it a "great honor" to be offered a scholarship by the Cornhuskers.

linebackers. Once I was on campus I knew that Nebraska was the school for me."

Miller picked the Cornhuskers over Michigan and Arizona State.

Green joins **Chris Loos** (6-4, 300, 5.2) of Lincoln (Southeast) as offensive linemen who have committed to the Cornhuskers. At running back, Nebraska has All-American **Josh Davis** (6-0, 195, 4.5) of Loveland, Colo., who stunned the prep football world in the Big 12 area with one of the most spectacular showcases of all-purpose talent in the country.

Davis rushed for 1,233 yards and 14 touchdowns while catching 22 passes for another 550 yards and two touchdowns. However, the kick and punt return game was where Davis really shined. Davis returned only six kick-offs this past season as opponents kicked away from him — and for good reason. Davis scored on four of those, with a long of 89 yards. On punt returns, Davis was equally dangerous, averaging 45 yards per return with four touchdowns and a long return of 93 yards.

Throw in All-America fullback **Judd Davies** (6-2, 230, 4.6) of Omaha (Millard North), Neb., and the Huskers already have one of the top running back classes in the country.

Tight end **Trevor Johnson** (6-4, 220, 4.7) of Lincoln (Northeast) is the top prospect at his position in the state.

On defense the Cornhuskers are holding with commitments from **Ryon Bingham** (6-4, 260, 4.9) of Sandy

REP REPORT

Keeping Up With COLBY FREEMAN

WE GOT BEAT by Wichita Falls Hirschi last week, and it was one of the most disappointing losses I have ever been through.

We were ahead 21-0 at halftime, but we had a momentum shift in the second half we couldn't stop. I felt helpless on the sideline when our defense was on the field.

The momentum shifted so quickly on the field that it was strange. We kept trying to turning it back, but some of our execution wasn't there, some of our blocks weren't made and we couldn't get things to go our way. At the end of the game we sat back with our mouths wide open in disbelief. It just wasn't to be. We lost 23-21 in the area round.

Despite the loss I had more fun this year playing football than I have every had. I had the great privilege of playing with a bunch of guys who are great people and made football fun for me this year.

The loss has been tough on my dad and me, because we realize that I won't be playing for him any longer. The relationship that we have built is a double relationship. It's a father/son relationship and a coach/player relationship, so it's been a double whammy with our recent loss.

It's been hard for me because every coach at Brownwood is some kind of a father to me. That's how close I am to everybody. I am around them so much and have been around them so much since dad got the job here. It's been hard to watch them start the offseason with me not being a part of the group. You feel like you are on the outside looking in. It's something I didn't want to let go of, but both of us realize that we have to move on, so we have talked about the recruiting process a lot this past week, and we are ready to get that thing narrowed down and get to a final decision pretty soon.

Monday after the loss I was sitting in my dad's office, and we made decisions about where I was going to visit. I narrowed my choices down to the same three that I have been talking to most of the time. The only difference now is that I have to let the other people know about my decision. I have to let Baylor and Syracuse know that Nebraska, Texas A&M and Texas are my top three choices. Those will be my three visits.

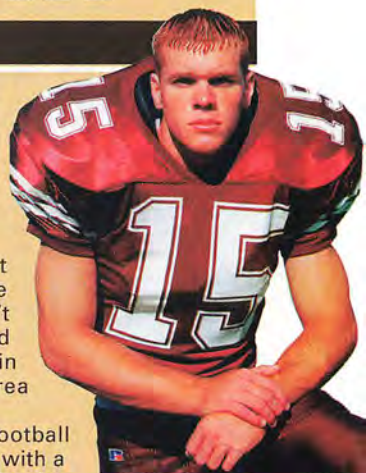
I am most comfortable at those three schools. I had a plan two years ago that I needed to go to school where I could really enjoy myself, and I ended up going to those schools' camps. I have been exposed to how they do things, and it's something that I feel real comfortable in and I feel comfortable in the decision I made. I really can't see myself up at New York for Syracuse, and some of my other schools don't seem to be stable in the coaching area.

I have set my dates. I have an official visit to Texas (Dec. 4), Nebraska (Dec. 11) and Texas A&M (Dec. 18). I am not going to put anybody in the lead before my visits. Coach (R.C.) Slocum of Texas A&M was the first head coach in my home. I was excited about that and had a chance to spend a lot of time with him because I drove him back to the airport.

I had a great visit with Coach Slocum. He really knows how to make a recruit know what the process is going to be like. I felt real comfortable with what he had to say. There was no pressure put on me at all with him, and I appreciate that. He helped me realize a little more what Texas A&M is all about.

The most important thing at this point is for me to sit down with the coaches at the various schools and get down to the nitty-gritty and get some answers to those questions that I have had for a long time. It's time to get some straight answers to whatever questions I have, and hopefully by the next time we talk I can tell you where I am going to school. ■ — **As told to James Hale**

Throughout the 1998 football season, Huskers Illustrated will chronicle the recruiting process of Brownwood quarterback Colby Freeman, one of the top prospects in Texas.



Colby FREEMAN

(Alta), Utah, and **Phil Peetz** (6-2, 245, 4.8) of Elkhorn, Neb., in the defensive line. **Shaun Coleman** (6-4, 212, 4.6) of Aurora (Jesuit), Colo., and **Spencer Owen** (6-6, 222, 4.6) of Carrollton, Mo., have both earned post season All-America honors as outside linebackers. Miller joins this group, making

this area one of the best of the recruiting class thus far.

Rob Blomeier (6-0, 185, 4.6) of Manheim Township, Pa., and **Taylor Gehman** (6-0, 190, 4.5) of Omaha (Northeast), Neb., are the defensive backs who have committed to the Cornhuskers.



Like last season's top-rated prep recruit Ronald Curry (above), Chris Massey is an athletic quarterback who can play immediately at the Division I-A level. Curry originally committed to Virginia before deciding to play at North Carolina.

Upgrading the quarterback position is still a priority in Lincoln, and the Cornhuskers are in on some of the very best in the country.

The top run/pass quarterback in the land is **Chris Massey** (6-1, 198, 4.4) of Spiro, Okla.

It seems the Cornhuskers go into Oklahoma and steal one or two of the top prospects out of the Sooner state every year. If they are able to sign Massey, it would be a double whammy to Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, as both have Massey at the top of their recruiting boards.

Massey rushed for over 1,200 yards and has thrown for over 1,000. He is also close to 100 tackles as a defensive back with five interceptions. Massey may be the quickest quarterback in the country, and he is already an expert in running the option attack.

Massey led Spiro to the Class 3A state championship game, which was played on Dec. 4. Massey was to take an unofficial visit to Oklahoma State that weekend. He was scheduled to take official visits to Michigan (Dec. 12), Nebraska (Dec. 19), Kansas State (Jan. 5), Notre Dame (Jan. 12) and Miami (Jan. 19).

Sometime in January Massey will also take an unofficial visit to Oklahoma and Arkansas. Massey received the first recruiting call from new Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops.

Going into the recruiting hunt, Massey seems wide open about his choices.

"I am trying to take an open mind into my visits," said Massey. "I know more about the schools closest to me, like OU, Oklahoma State and Arkansas, and that is why I am taking unofficial visits to those schools."

"The others I don't know a lot about, so I will take my official visits there. I want to find a school that will give me a shot to play quarterback early. They need to be running an offense that fits my skills, which means they have to use the quarterback in the option or running game."

"I am used to winning at Spiro, and I will look for a college program that can do the same thing."

If Massey is the top-rated run/pass quarterback, then **C.J. Leak** (6-4, 210, 4.5) of Charlotte (Independence), N.C. isn't far behind.

The multi-talented Leak says he

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will take visits to Syracuse, Nebraska and Notre Dame. The Orangemen get the first visit on Dec. 12.

Jammal Lord (6-3, 190, 4.6) of Bayonne, N.J., is another highly pursued run/pass quarterback type who is taking a serious look at Nebraska.

Lord rushed for over 1,100 yards this past season for 22 touchdowns, while throwing for another 350 yards and four scores. Lord was slated to visit Iowa (Dec. 4), Syracuse (Dec. 12), Nebraska (Dec. 18), Ohio State (Jan. 5) and Arizona State (Jan. 12).

"Nebraska is always a team that is contending for national championships," said Lord. "They run an offense that is perfect for my abilities and have some of the best facilities in the country."

Latrez Harrison (6-2, 198, 4.48) of Atlanta (Washington) and **Colby Freeman** (6-3, 210, 4.55) of Brownwood, Texas, are also highly touted run/pass quarterbacks being wooed by Nebraska.

Nebraska landed the top recruit out of Canada a year ago in running back **Dahrran Diedrick** of Toronto, and they hope to do the same this season.

Offensive lineman **Watshidimba Kabongo** (6-7, 280, 5.2) of Montreal (Vanier Prep) visited the Cornhuskers on Nov. 26 and says that Nebraska is the slight leader over Central Florida (Dec. 20), Kentucky (Dec. 12), Alabama (Jan. 15), Florida State and Boston College. ■



A year ago, Nebraska freshman running back Dahrran Diedrick (above) was the top recruit out of Canada. The Huskers hope to land another talented Canadian, Watshidimba Kabongo, this year.

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There Is Still Life In Lincoln

If the Colorado game was any indication, the emotional death of the Husker football team has been greatly exaggerated



Mike BABCOCK

ERIC JOHNSON'S left arm was in a sling when he came to the South Stadium varsity lounge to be interviewed following Nebraska's 16-14 victory against Colorado.

His shoulder had popped out three times during the game. "It's painful now," said the junior weakside linebacker, whose smile belied the pain. "But it wasn't while I was playing."

And even if it had been painful, he would

have done his best to play.

You can't keep a good man down. And Johnson is nothing if not a good man. "I didn't want to let the seniors down," he explained. "I think everybody was on a mission today, real motivated."

"We had to sell out and get it done." Pain or no pain.

The Colorado game was the last at Memorial Stadium for 21 Cornhusker seniors, as well as the last of the regular season for a Nebraska team that had planned to win the Big 12 championship and make a run at a second consecutive national championship and fourth in the last five seasons.

As it turned out, however, the Cornhuskers played for little more than pride.

Considering that, Johnson could have been excused for calling it a day after his shoulder popped out of its socket in the game's first quarter. But he popped it back in and kept on playing.

Johnson sacked Colorado quarterback Mike Moschetti for a 10-yard loss during the second quarter before leaving the game after the shoulder popped out a second time.

His sack, on a first-and-10 at the Nebraska 37-yard line, was a key factor in forcing the Buffaloes' Jeremy Aldrich to attempt a 52-yard field goal three plays later. The kick failed.

After the second time, Johnson was told he wouldn't be going back in the game.

His status was announced in the press box; he would not be returning to action. During the third quarter, however, there was a Cornhusker in Johnson's No. 27 jersey pursuing Moschetti again.

The player, of course, was Johnson.

"I told a little bit of a story to the doctors," he said somewhat sheepishly, explaining how he was able to get clear-

ance from the trainers to return to the game. "I told them it was feeling better."

He needed help to bring Moschetti down because of the shoulder problem and was forced to leave the game for a third and final time — after popping the shoulder back in once again.

Johnson might well have been among those playing for the final time at home. He would have been a senior in eligibility had he not been granted an additional season by the NCAA.

Players who don't meet freshman eligibility requirements

under Proposition 16 can regain a season if they make satisfactory progress towards completing an undergraduate degree.

Johnson made the academic progress and petitioned the NCAA. Even though the Cornhusker media guide lists him as a junior, he didn't learn for sure that he would get the fifth year of eligibility "until a couple of games ago," he said. "I'm blessed to get another chance."

The Nebraska defense is blessed as well. Johnson is among the most athletic linebackers in Cornhusker history, holding position records in the 10- and 40-yard dashes and the pro-agility run.

He's also among the team's most inspirational and emotional players.

Emotion was the order of the day for the Colorado game, of course. "It seemed like everybody in the 'tunnel

walk' had tears in their eyes for the seniors," Johnson said.

"We seniors were emotional," said tight end and co-captain Sheldon Jackson. "But the younger guys were the ones with tears in their eyes. I was worried if too many of those guys, like Eric Johnson, Tony Ortiz and some others, were crying, they wouldn't be able to play."

The defenders, young and old, played as if they were on a mission against Colorado, limiting the Buffaloes to 246 total yards, despite a disparity in time of possession of 7:24.

"The fact that they were out there a lot, you worry about them getting worn down," said coach Frank Solich. "But they stayed and made the big plays when they had to make them."

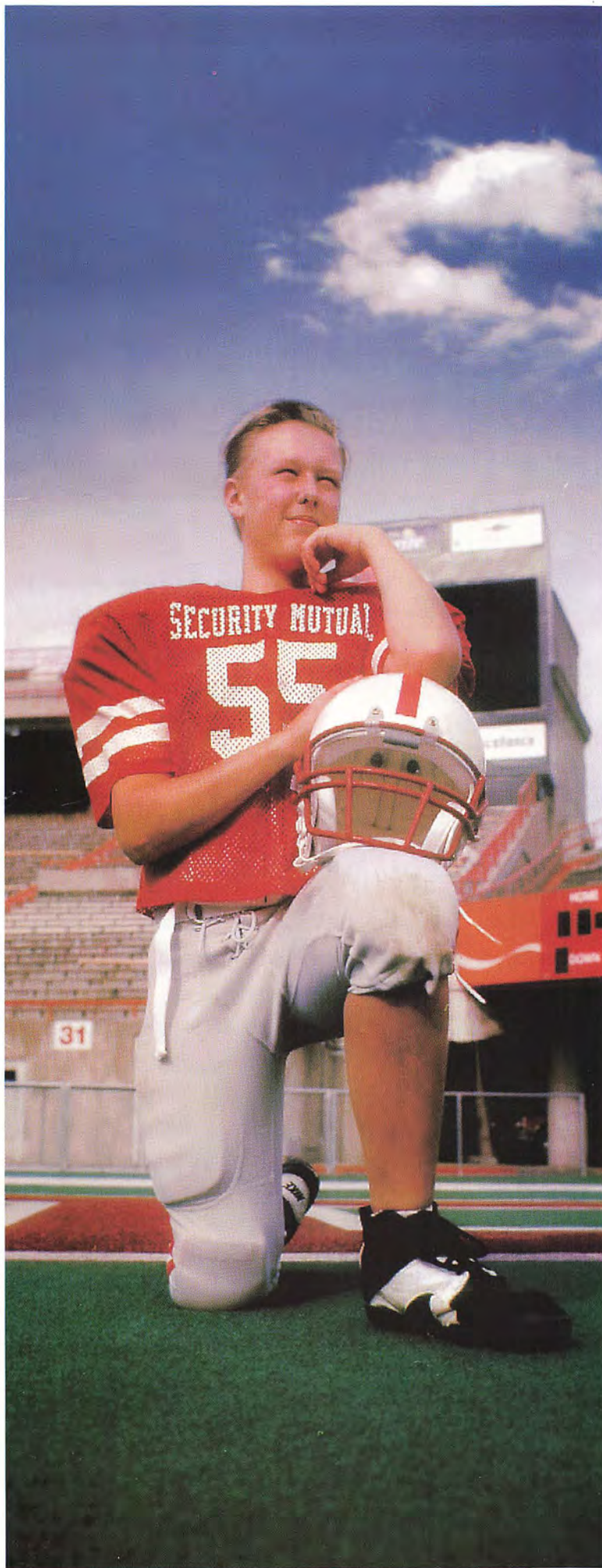
Johnson wanted to stay despite the pain in his left shoulder. "It was real emotional to see the seniors," he said. "Those guys are my brothers. It's like we were all in the army and Coach Solich was the general."

Without question, Johnson proved he is a good soldier. ■



After his shoulder popped out of the socket for the third time, trainers hid Eric Johnson's pads so he couldn't return to the Colorado game.

Scott Babin



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